

Contributions to Hermeneutics 2

Scott Davidson

Marc-Antoine Vallée *Editors*

Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur

Between Text and Phenomenon

 Springer

Contributions to Hermeneutics

Volume 2

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Scott Davidson • Marc-Antoine Vallée
Editors

Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur

Between Text and Phenomenon

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Contents

Part I From Existentialism and Phenomenology to Hermeneutics

Ricoeur's Early Approaches to the Ontological Question 3
Marc-Antoine Vallée

**Distanciation and *Epoché*: The Influence of Husserl
on Ricoeur's Hermeneutics** 13
Leslie MacAvoy

Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricoeur 31
Richard Kearney

Part II Hermeneutic Phenomenology of the Self

**Identity and Selfhood: Paul Ricoeur's Contribution
and Its Continuations** 43
Claude Romano

For a Genealogy of Selfhood: Starting from Paul Ricoeur 61
Carmine Di Martino

**The World of the Text and the World of Life:
Two Contradictory Paradigms?** 75
Michaël Foessel

Part III Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Tradition, Memory and History

Word, Writing, Tradition 89
Michael Sohn

**Involuntary Memory and Apprenticeship to Truth:
Ricoeur Re-reads Proust** 105
Jeanne Marie Gagnebin

| | |
|---|-----|
| Memory, Space, Oblivion | 115 |
| Luis Ant3nio Umbelino | |
| The Enigma of the Past: Ricoeur’s Theory of Narrative as a Response to Heidegger | 123 |
| Pol Vandevælde | |
| Part IV Challenges and Future Directions for a Hermeneutic Phenomenology | |
| The Conflict of Hermeneutics | 143 |
| Marc de Launay | |
| Intersectional Hermeneutics | 159 |
| Scott Davidson | |
| Hermeneutics and Truth: From <i>Alētheia</i> to Attestation | 175 |
| Sebastian Purcell | |
| Constructing Ricoeur’s Hermeneutical Theory of Truth | 197 |
| Todd S. Mei | |

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Introduction

The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) is unrivaled with respect to its scope. No other thinker can claim to have been involved in more of the major debates of the twentieth century than Ricoeur. Freedom of the will, the unconscious, the body, evil, the problem of language, the relation of faith and reason, the philosophy of mind, personal identity, the question of justice, and countless other topics are addressed over the course of Ricoeur’s intellectual career. It is thus impossible for any single volume to do justice to such a vast and wide-ranging body of work. The best that can be hoped is to shed light on some portion of this immense oeuvre. *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur: Between Text and Phenomenon* takes up this task by calling attention to one especially important aspect of Ricoeur’s thought, namely, the interaction between his hermeneutics and his work in the school of phenomenology.

Ricoeur’s first exposure to Husserlian phenomenology occurred in the early 1930s through the famous “Friday evenings” hosted by Gabriel Marcel, where Marcel came to have an influence on many young French philosophers. What was initially appealing to Ricoeur was the connection between Husserl’s work and his already established interest in the tradition of French reflexive philosophy, represented by Jean Nabert and others. Although this tradition has mostly been forgotten today, in the broadest sense it might be described as an inheritance of the Cartesian and Kantian traditions which grant priority to the *cogito* and to the project of self-knowledge. Likewise, Husserlian phenomenology, especially in *Ideas I*, develops an egology. But, what Ricoeur admired about Husserl’s work, in particular, was its increased methodological rigor as well as its novel discovery of intentionality which overcame the Cartesian conception of consciousness.

Called to military service in 1939, Ricoeur spent much of World War II in a German prisoner of war camp. To pass the time there, he began a full translation of Husserl’s *Ideas I* in the margins of the book in the smallest imaginable handwriting. This personal copy, which Ricoeur carried back home in his knapsack, is on display today at the Fonds Ricoeur in Paris. This translation, along with an extended commentary, was published in 1950 and established Ricoeur’s reputation as one of the leaders of the phenomenological movement in France. Ricoeur would go on to write

many articles on other aspects of Husserl's thought, including studies of Husserl's unpublished manuscripts. And he would continue to exert an important influence on the next generation of Husserl scholars through frequent seminars and working groups on phenomenology.

Doctoral candidates, in Ricoeur's days, were required to submit two separate works to their committee: one that was more technical on a topic in the history of philosophy and a second more original work. Accompanying his translation and commentary on Husserl, Ricoeur presented *Freedom and Nature* in 1948 as the second part of his dissertation. This work was clearly inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, which emphasized the ambiguity of the body as both a subject and an object of perception. Ricoeur sought to extend this approach to the practical sphere in a project which he called an "eidetics of the will." Its aim was to describe the essential, invariant structures of human action in terms of the ambiguity of the body as both a voluntary source of the will that undertakes projects and an involuntary object in the world that is determined by the facticity of life, birth, and the unconscious. What was most innovative about this approach was Ricoeur's attempt to show the reciprocity that takes place between the voluntary and the involuntary through the notion of "consent to the involuntary" in which the self freely accepts its facticity.

This approach underscores the fact that Ricoeur was quite wary of the idealistic tendencies of Husserlian phenomenology, especially as they are expressed in *Ideas I*. Husserl's Idealism casts a shadow over his interpretation of subjectivity and the experiences whose meanings are constituted by it. Husserl establishes the subject of experience as a pure ego that is set apart from the natural world and adopts the standpoint of a spectator of the world. From such a perspective, the meaning of experience becomes reduced to its meaning for the pure ego. The Ricoeurian ego, by contrast, is not defined as a theoretical spectator but as a *homo capax*, or, a capable human who has the power to act in the world. But the powers of human praxis are fragile and precariously exposed to their limits, and as a result, the practical subject is a mixture of activity and passivity, capable of both acting and suffering. This is why the Ricoeurian self, instead of being a transcendental master or an unshakeable foundation of meaning, can be described as a "wounded cogito," irreducible but marked by its limits. And indeed, the subsequent works in Ricoeur's trilogy – *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil* – address the limit-experiences resulting from the experiences of fault, sin, and evil whose meanings remain an enigma and a mystery to oneself. The inquiry into the meaning of such limit-experiences calls for a passage beyond a purely phenomenological discourse and supplementation by other modes of discourse – such as those of symbols and myths.

It was his investigation of symbols and myths that sparked Ricoeur's initial interest in the field of hermeneutics. Indeed, in addition to his work in introducing Husserlian phenomenology to France, Ricoeur played an equally important role with regard to hermeneutics. From the 1960s and onwards, Ricoeur introduced French readers to the hermeneutic tradition, both through his exposition of other hermeneutic thinkers (Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Bultmann, Gadamer) as well as the development of his own original contributions to the field. As the editor of a series

with the French publisher Seuil, he helped to bring about a French translation of Hans Georg-Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. The two philosophers initially met at a conference in 1957, which sparked a series of letters between the two and the eventual pursuit of a French translation of the work. As with his relation to Husserl, Ricoeur saw an important breakthrough in Gadamer's work. Post-Heideggerian hermeneutics challenges the Husserlian pretense to establish a presuppositionless starting point for phenomenology and provide a direct access to the phenomena. Instead, understanding is mediated by the work of interpretation to the extent that it always takes place within the context of a tradition that establishes an orientation and direction for meaning. But, while Ricoeur recognizes the importance of the hermeneutic starting point, he is at the same time wary of certain aspects of Gadamer's thought. One source of concern is that tradition can also be a way of narrowing or ossifying the possibilities of meaning in an ideological manner. His own hermeneutics will thus place an emphasis on the importance of innovation and creation within a tradition, and on the need of a critical interpretation of what is transmitted by tradition.

In spite of their differences, phenomenology and hermeneutics share something essential in common: this is what Ricoeur calls "the choice for meaning." The discovery of intentional consciousness, in Husserlian phenomenology, is the discovery of the directedness of consciousness toward meaning. For phenomenology, then, every question concerning being is thus a question about the meaning of being. The same can be said of hermeneutics, insofar as it too regards all experience to be meaningful and seeks to disclose meanings that are hidden or latent within it. This connection between the two discourses leads Ricoeur to call for a graft of hermeneutics onto phenomenology. In so doing, phenomenology is opened up to a non-idealistic conception of meaning, in which meaning is discovered in addition to being produced. This trajectory is not entirely absent from Husserl's phenomenology, either; it turns up later when Husserl practices a method of questioning back from conscious experience to its origins in the pre-conscious lifeworld. And conversely, Ricoeur acknowledges that one could legitimately speak also of a grafting of phenomenology onto hermeneutics. In so doing, hermeneutics is able to establish a critical distance from the lived experience of belonging to a tradition. Phenomenology can thus lead hermeneutics beyond the mere acceptance of a tradition and bring about a deeper understanding of its meaning.

Based on this mediation between phenomenology and hermeneutics, it could be said that Ricoeur's thought is placed under a twofold demand: between the rigor of the text and the requirements of the phenomenon. The rigor of the text calls for fidelity to what the text actually says, while the requirement of the phenomenon is established by the Husserlian call to return "to the things themselves." A naïve interpretation of this dynamic might suggest that this would pull Ricoeur's thought in two irreconcilable directions – either toward the text that is distanced from the world or to the things that stand apart from the text. But, as Ricoeur's "hermeneutic phenomenology" reminds us, these two movements are in fact reconcilable. There is a hermeneutic component of phenomenology in its attempt to go beyond the surface of things to their deeper meaning, just as there is a phenomenological component of

hermeneutics in its attempt to establish a critical distance toward the world to which we belong. For this reason, Ricoeur's thought involves a double movement proceeding from the text to the phenomenon and from the phenomenon back to the text.

While the relation between phenomenology and hermeneutics was an explicit theme of many essays in the middle of his career, it is important to highlight the fact that hermeneutic phenomenology remains present in his later work as well, even though it is not thematized directly there. This can be observed, for instance, in *Oneself as Another* (1990). The influence of phenomenology is already evident on the opening pages in which the French use of “*se*” in reflexive verbs points back to the reflexive dimension of self-experience. Although Ricoeur maintains that the reflexive experience of the self is irreducible, he also acknowledges that it is exposed continually to the threat of suspicion and critique. In response, *Oneself as Another* sets out to develop a hermeneutics of the self that restores self-understanding by way of a hermeneutic detour through the philosophy of language, the philosophy of action, the question of personal identity, and the ethical determinations of action. The back and forth movement between phenomenology and hermeneutics also guides the structure of Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004). The first part of the book begins with a study of the phenomenological experience of memory “in the spirit of Husserlian phenomenology.” Ricoeur examines memory starting from the question of what is remembered, passing through the question of how it is remembered, and ultimately arriving at the question of who is remembering. But, to the extent that memory is always accompanied by the threat of falsification and the shadow of forgetting, this phenomenology of lived experience must also be accompanied by a hermeneutics of history. The role of this critical hermeneutics is to discern and uncover the distortion and forgetting that can take place in individual memories through the recovery of traces of the past.

These brief examples serve as a reminder that Ricoeur's later work continues to operate under the twofold requirement of the rigor of the phenomenon and the rigor of the text. Even if his hermeneutic phenomenology is not an explicit topic of Ricoeur's focus, it nonetheless still underlies the movement of his thought in his later works. The chapters collected in this book will highlight further, and in much greater detail, how this back and forth movement between phenomenology and hermeneutics takes place throughout Ricoeur's oeuvre.

The first part of the book provides a contextual background for Ricoeur's thought by examining some of the most significant sources of his hermeneutic phenomenology.

Marc-Antoine Vallée explores the existentialist influences on Ricoeur's early approach to the ontological question. He invites us to rediscover Ricoeur's thinking on being and human existence before the formulation, in *The Conflict of the Interpretations* (1969), of the well-known distinction between a “short route” and a “long route” as two different ways to graft the hermeneutic problem onto the phenomenological method. He shows that another distinction was crucial at the time: an opposition between “unifocal” ontology and “bifocal” ontology, represented respectively by Heidegger and Sartre, on the one hand, and by Jaspers and Marcel, on the other hand. This opposition appears in Ricoeur's first books on Karl Jaspers

and Gabriel Marcel, in 1947, and structures the reflection on the ontological question in his *Philosophy of the Will* (1950/60), where the existentialist approach of the early works encounters phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches.

The question of the relation between phenomenology and hermeneutics becomes a central issue, in Ricoeur's work, during the 1960s and the 1970s. Leslie MacAvoy's chapter "Distanciation and *Epoché*: The Influence of Husserl on Ricoeur's Hermeneutics" shows that Ricoeur's concept of distanciation is central to his critical hermeneutics elaborated during this period. This concept gets its critical potential from Husserl's notion of the *epoché*. The *epoché* is a bracketing of the natural attitude that inaugurates the phenomenological attitude. From this vantage point, the sense of reality is established through a synthesis of the actual and the possible. The *epoché* introduces the possible in the real by opening up a space for the imagination in the activity of eidetic variation. The role of the *epoché* is echoed in Ricoeur's treatment of the text as the opening up of a second order reference. The text exposes the reader not only to other possible worlds but to other possible ways of being, thus affording a perspective from which one can question current ways of being.

Richard Kearney's contribution continues this reflection on the relation between phenomenology and hermeneutics in Ricoeur's work by questioning the way the hermeneutical turn in the direction of language and texts, during the 1960s and the following decades, seems to move him away from important insights about "carnal signification" that were present in his early phenomenological works, especially in *Freedom and Nature* (1950). However, Kearney's intention is not simply to go back to this phenomenology, as if the hermeneutical turn were a mistake. On the contrary, his aim is to improve this idea of "carnal signification" in a hermeneutical context inspired mostly by Ricoeur's later writings, especially *Oneself as Another* (1990). This "carnal hermeneutics," which is situated at the crossroads of the phenomena of flesh, embodiment, language, and interpretation, brings Ricoeur's thought into dialogue with the works of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas.

The questions of the self and of our belonging to the world, at the core of Ricoeur's hermeneutics during the 1980s and 1990s, are taken up by the chapters in part II.

Claude Romano wonders whether all the innovations in Ricoeur's thinking on selfhood in *Oneself as Another* (1990) is diminished by his effort to retain some aspects of modern philosophies of consciousness taken up by French reflexive philosophy and Husserlian phenomenology. The question here is whether selfhood can properly be conceived as a form of identity, as Ricoeur suggests. Romano explains why, according to him, this cannot be the case. This does not mean that Ricoeur's concept of selfhood, which Romano sees as a major contribution to reflection on the self, should be abandoned. But we should seek a better way of understanding the relationship between selfhood, understood as the ability to endorse and be responsible for our commitments, and our qualitative identity.

Carmine Di Martino explores another aspect of Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology of the self by developing a "genealogy of ipseity" that takes account of the fact that otherness is, from the outset, constitutive of selfhood. He shows that, in the

context of *Oneself as Another*, this otherness presents itself in the triple form of otherness of the flesh, of others, and of the voice of conscience. Di Martino, however, gives a certain primacy to the otherness of others over the other two forms of alterity, since he maintains that the otherness of our own body and of the voice of our conscience arises, strictly speaking, only from the otherness at work in the inter-subjective relationship. In order to understand this point better, he puts Ricoeur's thought in dialogue with the works of Axel Honneth, René Spitz, and Jan Patocka, who allow us to understand how our belonging to the world is marked fundamentally by our relationships with others.

Language is another constitutive element of our belonging to the world to be taken into account, as strongly demonstrated by Ricoeur before *Oneself as Another* in *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975) and *Time and Narrative* (1983–1985). Michaël Foessel addresses the issue of whether Ricoeur's hermeneutics leads to a form of linguistic idealism in which the self is enclosed in language. In response to this question, he contends on the one hand that textuality cannot be reduced to a set of cultural objects in the world, but instead constitutes a fundamental dimension of our being in the world. If this is true, reading is not simply one activity among others, but the paradigmatic transaction in which the self engages is a hermeneutic of meaning. But on the other hand, to read is not only to enter the world of the text; it is to enter into the textuality by which the world presents itself to us. In this sense, Foessel helps us to understand how Ricoeur's hermeneutic continues the phenomenological ambition of presenting the things themselves, which distinguishes it from a pure linguistic idealism.

Part III "Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Tradition, Memory and History" examines another very important aspect of the alterity that constitutes the self. The self does not exist on its own, instead it is defined in part by its belonging to a world that is already there. As such, it inherits a past that precedes it. The influence of the past is explored in part III in terms of the role of tradition, memory, and history.

Michael Sohn, in "Word, Writing, Tradition," focuses on Ricoeur's earlier writings on tradition, specifically his critical engagement with French structuralism and philosophy of language during the 1960s through the early 1970s, which inform his later more well-known reflections on the Gadamer-Habermas debate. Instead of pursuing the now familiar themes of critique and ideology, distanciation and belonging, the chapter examines the themes of word or speech (*parole*) and writing (*écriture*). Sohn contends that Ricoeur offers a critique of a dead and static notion of tradition, and instead develops a living and dynamic sense of tradition, as an eventful address of speech mediated by writing through the phenomenon of the "written voice" and the "listening reader." By attending to and parsing the meanings of *parole* and *écriture*, this chapter unfolds a philosophically rigorous and linguistically informed concept of tradition.

The contributions of Jeanne Marie Gagnebin and Luis António Umbelino shed light on our bodily relation to time and space. Jeanne Marie Gagnebin examines Ricoeur's reading of *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust, which is developed in the second volume of *Time and Narrative* (1984). She insists first and foremost on the corporeality of involuntary memory. Highlighting both the strengths and

weaknesses of Ricoeur's interpretation, Gagnebin argues that Ricoeur has not sufficiently emphasized this corporeal dimension of memory that is so crucial in Proustian descriptions, where it is primarily the body that remembers through the senses of taste, smell, touch, etc. Far from being secondary, the anchoring of memory in corporeality is essential to the sudden rediscovery of the time that was believed to be lost forever.

If Ricoeur has neglected this embodied aspect of memory in his reading of Proust, Luis António Umbelino shows that the bodily space we inhabit consists of an architectural materiality marked by memories. Taking several themes developed especially in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000), Umbelino helps us to realize that memory is far from being an exclusively temporal experience, but also has a very important spatial dimension. Just as the analyses of *Time and Narrative* described a third time in between the objective time of the sciences and the purely subjective experience of time, Ricoeur's reflections on built and inhabited space brings out a third space between the objective geometrical space and the absolute here of my body. And this built space is not separate from human time, since this space is deeply marked by history.

Pol Vandavelde, in "What Kind of Past Is the Referent of Historical Narratives?," examines two ways to circumscribe the "enigma of the past": first, the distinction between the past that is no longer (*Vergangenheit*) and the past that is still relevant and meaningful to us (*das Gewesene*) and, second, the distinction between an event (*Ereignis*), as what makes history possible, and a historical fact, as what falls into historical times and can be recorded. In order to situate this problem, Vandavelde appeals to Nietzsche's views about the "uses and disadvantages of history for life." Like Nietzsche, both Heidegger and Ricoeur acknowledge the power of the present to capture the past. However, against Heidegger's view that there is a sharp rupture between the event and historical facts, Ricoeur utilizes narrative to establish continuity between these two poles. As a case study, Vandavelde examines some "events" at the end of WWII that belong to "German suffering" and the historical delay that took place between the "happening" of these events and their recognition several decades later as "historical facts."

Whereas the third part focuses on the mediations that take place between the experience of the present and the belonging to a past, the contributions in the final part identify a variety of challenges that confront Ricoeur's efforts to mediate between differences. In this way, they engage in an effort to re-examine and re-deploy a Ricoeurian philosophy.

In "The Conflict of Hermeneutics," Marc de Launay asks how Ricoeur situated himself among the different hermeneutical conceptions of text and history. Despite Ricoeur's renunciation, in *Time and Narrative*, of the ideal of a total mediation of history represented by Hegel's philosophy and his appropriation of Koselleck's work in the sense of an open mediation, de Launay thinks that Ricoeur puts himself in an uncomfortable position. Indeed, Ricoeur found himself in the position of relying on different competing and conflicting philosophical schools: on the one hand, a Kantian inspired lineage including Schleiermacher and Koselleck, and on the other hand, a more Hegelian way of thinking represented principally by Gadamer.

De Launay argues that Ricoeur's "ecumenical intent" to reconcile these different hermeneutics cannot be maintained in the end. He demonstrates this point through a critical discussion of Ricoeur's interpretation of the biblical story of "original sin."

Scott Davidson's "Intersectional Hermeneutics" provides a phenomenological assessment of Ricoeur's version of the hermeneutic circle, arguing that it imposes an unwarranted restriction on the "things themselves." This narrowing of the text is traced to the introduction of structuralism into Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Guided by the example of critical controversy over the interpretation of Shakespeare's play "The Tempest," Davidson shows that structuralist explanation narrows the meaning of the text and, in turn, inhibits access to the phenomena that are sought. To salvage Ricoeur's hermeneutics, Davidson then proposes a productive dialogue with intersectional theory. On the one hand, Ricoeur's hermeneutics can provide a methodological framework for intersectional theorists that situates their work within a hermeneutics of understanding. On the other hand, Ricoeur's hermeneutics benefits from this new connection with intersectionality to the extent that it provides a substitute for structuralism and combats "false consciousness." As a result, "intersectional hermeneutics" is faithful at once to the spirit of Ricoeur's hermeneutical project and to the things themselves.

Sebastian Purcell, in his essay, aims to differentiate Ricoeur's hermeneutics from a Heideggerian conception of the finitude of human understanding. This brings Ricoeur's work into contact with some of the most pressing problems in contemporary Continental metaphysics. Drawing from the work of Alain Badiou, Purcell argues that Ricoeur develops an infinite hermeneutics, which thus develops Heidegger's sense of hermeneutics significantly. This position is demonstrated by tracing the itinerary from Heidegger's account of *aletheia* to Ricoeur's account of attestation. The conclusion is that Ricoeur offers a viable new opening for the future of hermeneutics.

In "Constructing Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Theory of Truth," Todd Mei constructs a theory of truth from various texts that span Ricoeur's career. While there are various works in which Ricoeur devotes attention to the problem of truth—for example, in *History and Truth* (1955), his conception of manifestation in his biblical hermeneutics, and when discussing convictions and non-epistemological beliefs in *Oneself as Another*—a more unified theory is never formulated. Mei's construction of a comprehensive theory of truth begins by situating Ricoeur between Heidegger's notion of truth as disclosure and MacIntyre's view that truth is monolithic. Mei contends that fragility acts as the founding concept for a Ricoeurian theory of truth. This means that the core of his theory is ethically grounded as opposed to emphasizing ontological disclosure, consistency of beliefs with a metaphysical principle, or the analysis of the reasonableness of propositions.

Each of these chapters, in its own way, recognizes the variety of different approaches to understanding the phenomena and providing sound interpretations of their meaning. In this sense, the task of a Ricoeurian philosophy is first and foremost that of opening a space of reflexivity, where the validity of the claims that we make about the world and ourselves can be explored. This means that philosophy, in trying to say true and essential things about different phenomena (the body, the

self, history, tradition, etc.), must first expose itself to the conflict of interpretations. And it is after opening up this space of possibilities that the work of mediation between different claims and interpretations can begin. The search for the best interpretation and the richest set of meanings is precisely the aim of Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology.

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Part I
From Existentialism and Phenomenology
to Hermeneutics

Ricoeur's Early Approaches to the Ontological Question

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Abstract In *The Conflict of Interpretations* (1969), Ricoeur makes an important distinction between two different ways to approach the ontological question: a short route (represented by Heidegger) and a long route (Ricoeur's path). Since then, this well-known distinction has always played a central role in understanding the ontological question in Ricoeur. But the aim of this chapter is to show that, before the *Conflict of Interpretations*, Ricoeur was considering the ontological question from a different point of view, by using a distinction between unifocal and bifocal approaches. This distinction appears in Ricoeur's early work, first and foremost, in order to shed light on the difference between an ontology focusing on human existence (Heidegger and Sartre) and another approach insisting on the tension between human finitude and Transcendence (Jaspers and Marcel). But the project of the *Philosophy of the Will* (1950–1960) was also based on this idea of a bifocal ontology. Directly inspired by the philosophies of Jaspers and Marcel, Ricoeur developed a paradoxical ontology of fallibility, of disproportion or non-coincidence with oneself, but still animated by the sight of a reconciled ontology.

Keywords Ontology • Being • Existence • Transcendence • Finitude

Introduction

The 1965 article, “Existence and Hermeneutics” opening *The Conflict of Interpretations*, has always played a central role in understanding the ontological question in Ricoeur, and for good reasons. There are several important ideas contained in this article, including that of a “graft of the hermeneutic problem onto the phenomenological method” (Ricoeur 2004: 3). Ontological thinking takes first and foremost the form of a hermeneutic question about the understanding a human being can have of his own being. Far from being a discipline answering purely exegetical problems, hermeneutics indicates the place where the fundamental

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question about the ontological meaning of human existence can be asked, insofar as this meaning is not already obvious, but can only reveal itself at the cost of a significant effort of interpretation. As everyone knows, this grafting of the hermeneutic problem onto phenomenology can be understood, according to Ricoeur, in two different ways, depending on whether we follow a “short route” or a “long route”. The short route would be the one chosen by Heidegger that would ontologize understanding and assume a sharp break with epistemological and methodological issues. In this perspective, the aim is to put forward a more fundamental view of understanding as Dasein’s mode of being and not as a simple mode of knowing. Against this Heideggerian approach, Ricoeur raises the objection that the analysis of understanding as a mode of being cannot itself escape from epistemological and methodological issues, because this analysis is a form of understanding in the sense of a mode of knowing. So Ricoeur puts into question “the possibility of the making of a direct ontology, free at the outset from any methodological requirements and consequently outside the circle of interpretation whose theory this ontology formulates” (Ricoeur 2004: 7). That is the reason why Ricoeur chooses the long route, a more indirect way, that passes through the detour of an interpretation of the signs and the symbols, and the reflective task of the appropriation of our desire to be and our effort to exist expressed by our actions and our works. An answer to the ontological question could only be sought by plunging into the conflict between the interpretations offered by the different human sciences. And it is this long route that Ricoeur seems to have followed throughout his philosophical journey. But we ignore too often that this is not the way the ontological question first arises in Ricoeur’s work. In order to have a better understanding of Ricoeur’s philosophical journey, I will try to show how the ontological question is addressed from the first books, on Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, in 1947, up to the publication of the second volume of his *Philosophy of the Will* (including *Fallible Man* and *Symbolism of Evil*) in 1960.

A Bifocal Approach (1947)

The oldest traces of the ontological problem in Ricoeur’s work can be found in his first books on the existential philosophies of Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, more precisely in the study on *Karl Jaspers and the Philosophy of Existence* (1947), written with Mikel Dufrenne, and the book on *Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers: Philosophy of the Mystery and Philosophy of the Paradox* (1947). These works describe a fundamental thinking about the being of man, which constantly tries to shed light on human existence in its relation to Transcendence or to God. In Ricoeur’s eyes, the main interest of the works of Jaspers and Marcel, from an ontological point of view, consists first and foremost in the development of a “bifocal” ontology, in contrast with “unifocal” approaches such as those of Martin Heidegger or Jean-Paul Sartre (Ricoeur 1947: 18, 32–34; Ricoeur and Dufrenne 1947: 363–372). In fact, we should distinguish between the philosophies of existence precisely by the choice they make of either a “bifocal” approach (Jaspers and

Marcel) – putting in tension the poles of existence and Being, freedom and Transcendence, human being and God –, or of a “unifocal” approach – trying to think the being of human being or Dasein without any reference to a divine Transcendence or an ultimate Being (Heidegger and Sartre). Between these two types of existential ontology, there is something irreconcilable:

It is not possible to superimpose reflections on human being belonging to a philosophy without divine Transcendence – as in Heidegger and Sartre – and those of a philosophy where freedom and Transcendence are polar opposites, as in K. Jaspers and G. Marcel. (Ricoeur 1947: 18 (my translation)).

Obviously, the choice of either of these approaches has a major impact on how to conduct philosophical investigation. It determines, for example, how to ask the question of the meaning of human freedom. How should we think our freedom from an existential point of view? Should it be defined in tension with Transcendence, as proposed by Jaspers’ “paradoxical ontology”? Is it the possibility to tear ourselves away from the world and to open our existence to Transcendence? Or, on the contrary, should we think about it, with Heidegger, from the perspective of our radical finitude and our fundamental belonging to being? Between Jaspers and Heidegger, there are two completely different ways of posing the problem of freedom. This is the same between Marcel and Sartre, as Ricoeur notes. Indeed, the freedom described by Marcel is a fragile freedom, a freedom embodied and exposed to mystery, which is opposed in every respect to the absolute freedom of Sartre and his nothingness.

The fundamental question underlying this opposition between unifocal and bifocal ontology is whether a philosophical reflection on human existence can put aside any reference to God or Transcendence to describe the being of man in a purely immanent way, or whether any bracketing of the reference to God or Transcendence necessarily leads to a truncated and inadequate view of human existence. Clearly, for Jaspers and Marcel, a philosophy of existence cannot be reduced to a reflection on human being, but must inevitably describe human existence in its quest for Being, Transcendence or God. The shared belief of these two philosophers is that human existence is set to exceed itself, that a movement pushes it toward a Transcendence on which its being depends.¹ As explained by Ricoeur:

The *purpose* of philosophy is being, and not existence: transcending is the movement which, in seeking being, rejects the modes of being that are not being in itself, which are *only* being as object or being oneself. This purpose is the fundamental presupposition of philosophy, its *impetus*, so to say, which is at the same time his discomfort and his certainty. This must be said before more detailed elucidation of the human condition. If the driving force of this movement runs out, philosophy is only a *description* of the human being in the world, which, according to the temperament of the philosophers and the rigor of his technical means, will be more literary or more phenomenological. The danger of an analytical

¹As Ricoeur writes: “The self (*le moi*) is not the last word of philosophy; existence – incarnate, free and dialogical existence – is not Transcendence; existence is only through Transcendence. This conviction, we know it, is the common soul of the philosophy of G. Marcel and that of K. Jaspers. These are both bifocal philosophies, against Heidegger and Sartre” (Ricoeur 1947: 265 (my translation)).

exposition of this kind of philosophy is precisely to separate a description of the human condition of a quest of being that is the real challenge of reflection. (Ricoeur 1947: 34 (Ricoeur's emphasis))

The great difficulty facing this conviction of Jaspers and Marcel is obviously the place that can be reserved for faith in the field of philosophy. In this regard, the work of Ricoeur reveals that Jaspers and Marcel take different paths, although related to each other by common themes. The path pursued by Jaspers is made up of dialectics and paradoxes, leading to a philosophical faith contemplating the ciphers of Transcendence. The path of Marcel is that of a second reflection going from problems, soluble in principle, to mysteries, insoluble in themselves. Thus, whereas the philosophy of Jaspers outlines a "paradoxical ontology", Marcel offers the reader a meditation on the ontological mystery open to religious faith. But, according to Ricoeur, these are not necessarily opposed and irreconcilable paths. Indeed, paradoxical ontology and ontological mystery meet if we are able to recognize that the paradox leads to the mystery, and that access to the mystery involves the paradox (Ricoeur and Dufrenne 1947: 387).

Will and Transcendence (1950)

Thus, the fundamental choice for Ricoeur, at the time, was neither between a paradoxical ontology (Jaspers) and a philosophy of the ontological mystery (Marcel), nor between a short route (Heidegger) and a long route (Ricoeur), as will be the case in *The Conflict of Interpretations*. The crucial choice was in the opposition between a unifocal ontology (Heidegger, Sartre) and a bifocal ontology (Jaspers, Marcel). And there is no doubt that Ricoeur preferred the second option. As reported by Ricoeur himself, in his intellectual autobiography, during the war and the years that followed, the works of Marcel and Jaspers exerted a much greater influence on him than those of Heidegger and Sartre (Ricoeur 1995: 16–17 and 20–23). This choice in favor of a bifocal ontology will find an important echo in the *Philosophy of the Will* (1950/60), Ricoeur's first major work, dedicated precisely to his master Gabriel Marcel. However, the *Philosophy of the Will* will not only repeat or be inspired by the existential approaches of Jaspers and Marcel. It is constructed, on the contrary, in an effort to articulate a plurality of approaches (existential, reflexive, phenomenological and hermeneutic) to an original question. But the fact remains that the use of these different approaches is clearly aimed at saying something fundamental about human existence and its relationship to Transcendence from the perspective of a bifocal philosophy.

From this point of view, the first volume of this *Philosophy of the Will, Freedom and Nature: the Voluntary and the Involuntary*, published in 1950, remains far below the realization of this major project. It limits itself, effectively, to a proposal of a phenomenological description of the voluntary and the involuntary, bracketing the questions of evil and Transcendence. One might think then that Ricoeur makes

up his own mind in favor of a unifocal ontology taking the form of a phenomenological description of existence as the mode of being of man. But it is clear from the beginning, in the project announced in 1950, that this is only a first step, that it is necessary to go beyond, if we want more than an abstract vision of human existence. And so Ricoeur warns that “the fundamental structures of the voluntary and the involuntary which we shall seek to *describe* and *understand* acquire their full significance only when the abstraction which enables to elaborate them is removed” (Ricoeur 1966: 3). The need to go beyond the limits of this abstraction will appear progressively with the growing tensions between the voluntary and the involuntary, freedom and necessity, refusal and consent. It will then become unavoidable to confront the questions of evil and Transcendence. That is the reason why the last pages of the first volume start to remove the brackets in order to address the problem of evil, in the second volume, and to talk about Transcendence, in a third volume, announced but never written.

These pages give us important details concerning the way Ricoeur appropriates the idea of a bifocal ontology. From human existence to God, from subject to Transcendence, there is a continuity, insofar as the phenomenological description of the voluntary and the involuntary leads to the question of Transcendence. As Ricoeur writes: “A philosophy of the subject and a philosophy of Transcendence – which is what a philosophy of man’s limitations is in the last resort – are both determined in one and the same movement” (Ricoeur 1966: 468). But the confrontation with this crucial question also introduces a discontinuity, requiring a change of method. More precisely, Ricoeur conceives a philosophical path implying a succession of two Copernican revolutions in accordance with a bifocal approach: a first one centered on human being, a second one centered on God or Transcendence. The first revolution “centers the world of object on the Cogito: the object is for the subject, the involuntary is for the voluntary, motives are for choice, capacities for effort, necessity for consent” (Ricoeur 1966: 471). It is under the sign of this first revolution that Ricoeur develops the analysis of *Freedom and Nature*. But this analysis comes up against the limits of human consent. There are forms of suffering and evil to which human being cannot consent. Hence the need to confront the question of evil and Transcendence and, in order to do so, to radically change perspectives:

But the deepening calls for a second Copernican revolution which displaces the center of reference from subjectivity to Transcendence. I am not this center and I can only invoke it and admire it in the ciphers which are its scattered symbols. This decentering, which demands a radically new method, enters into a philosophy of subjectivity in ways which can only be paradoxical (Ricoeur 1966: 472).

Certainly, one can only be struck here by Jaspers’ direct influence on the way Ricoeur presents this idea. The second Copernican revolution puts us on the path toward a paradoxical ontology, which will be developed by Ricoeur in 1960, in the second volume of the *Philosophy of the Will* (including *Fallible Man* and *Symbolism of Evil*). But before dealing with this subject, a brief detour is needed.

Two Articles (1957)

Ten years passed between the first and the second volume of the *Philosophy of the Will*. Between these two works, Ricoeur wrote several papers including two articles for the *Encyclopédie française* on “existential phenomenology” (1957a) and on the “renewal of ontology” (1957b). They are obviously minor encyclopedia articles, written in response in all likelihood to a specific request. Nevertheless, they have the merit of offering some insight on how Ricoeur then conceived the ontological problem. In “Existential Phenomenology”, the question of being comes up at the crossroads of the phenomenological approach developed by Husserl and the philosophies of existence of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, where the philosophies of Heidegger, Sartre, Marcel and Merleau-Ponty are rooted. Ricoeur underlines that the specificity of existential phenomenology is to reactivate the question of the meaning of being from a questioning about the being of man, which is on the mode of existence. This reactivation appears more specifically in the context of a questioning of human freedom, to the extent that any questioning of the latter is a question about the ontological status of human being. As Ricoeur explains it: “with freedom, the existential and the ontological become synonyms; the being of human being is to exist” (Ricoeur 1957a: 19.10.11 (my translation)). However, in this article, the question of the relationship between freedom and ontology is not raised explicitly in accordance with Ricoeur’s distinction between unifocal and bifocal approaches. This decision is probably related to the fact that, properly speaking, Jaspers does not participate in the phenomenological movement and, thus, cannot be mentioned here. Moreover, even if Ricoeur discusses the key works of Husserl and Heidegger, he focuses most of his attention on French phenomenology. In this context, the dividing line is drawn between a conception of freedom as the nullification of being, as defended by Sartre, and another conception of freedom as participation in being, represented by the works of Marcel and Merleau-Ponty. Despite their many differences, the common feature between Marcel and Merleau-Ponty is to start from a reflection on one’s own body to then open up a broader reflection on our being in the world or the ontological mystery. If one wishes to situate Ricoeur on this divide, it is quite clear that his work on *Freedom and Nature* takes the side of Marcel and Merleau-Ponty.²

If this first article was able to draw a significant distinction between competing approaches, unfortunately we cannot say the same thing about the second article on the “Renewal of Ontology”. Ricoeur’s main thesis is that the difficulties and aporias of Greek ontology have left three possibilities which played a key role in the renewal of ontology that took place in the first part of the twentieth century. The first possibility, which dates back to Anaximander and found in Kant its most important representative, is that of a philosophy that emphasizes the inherent limitations of any thought of being, or even the impossibility of any ontology. Ricoeur linked all philosophies “that have accentuated the transcendence of being against every attempt

²This is confirmed by what Ricoeur says in his intellectual autobiography about *Freedom and Nature* (Ricoeur 1995: 23).

of objectification, against all knowledge from experience or concepts” (Ricoeur 1957b: 19.16.16 (my translation)), with this first (im)possibility. Here he refers to authors like Lachelier, Lagneau, Nabert, Jaspers and Heidegger. The second option identified by Ricoeur is that of an ontology that would be based on the intuition of a transcendent reality. This is, of course, the path taken by Neo-Platonism, which has found new expression in the philosophies of Bergson, Lavelle, Marcel, Jaspers and Heidegger. The last possibility is that of a dialectical approach to the ontological problem that is not only in search of an appropriate discourse on being, but of the discourse of being itself. This is the possibility explored by the philosophies of Hyppolite and Weil, following Plato and Hegel. Although the distinction between these three possible approaches to the ontological question allows Ricoeur to collect and position a large number of authors, we must admit that this view is far too general to identify a key issue. The way it treats the works of Heidegger and Jaspers demonstrates this point very well. Any opposition between the two works is removed, despite the important differences between them. And these two works are described as participating in two approaches at the same time. We can thus understand why this tripartite approach to the ontological question was not introduced elsewhere in the work of Ricoeur, while he was trying to engage more significantly with the works of Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre and Marcel.

The “Little Ontology” of Fallible Man (1960)

It is especially in the second volume of the *Philosophy of the Will*, more specifically in Book I, called *Fallible Man*, that Ricoeur develops a more significant reflection of an ontological nature, that he provides what he himself calls his “little ontology” (*petite ontologie*).³ It is essentially an ontology of the human being, more specifically an ontology of human fallibility and disproportion. Indeed, Ricoeur’s project is then to address the problem of evil from the perspective of a philosophical anthropology relying on the results of the previous work of phenomenological description of the voluntary and involuntary achieved in the first volume of the *Philosophy of the Will*. The main aim is to root the possibility of evil, at the ontological level, in the fallibility of the human being, in an “only human freedom”. But it is important to note that, unlike what he will do in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Ricoeur does not explore yet the idea of a “hermeneutic ontology”. The being of human being and his fallible nature are revealed following an approach that claims to be purely reflexive. The use of a hermeneutic method, in the precise sense defined by Ricoeur at the time, that is to say as an approach to interpret the meaning of symbols and myths,

³This expression is used by Ricoeur in a conversation with Jean-Michel Le Lannou (Le Lannou (1990): 89).

becomes necessary only in Book II on the *Symbolism of Evil*.⁴ As Ricoeur says at the beginning of *Fallible Man*:

In maintaining that fallibility is a concept, I am presupposing at the outset that pure reflection – that is, a way of understanding and being understood that does not come through image, symbol, or myth – can reach a certain threshold of intelligibility where the possibility of evil appears inscribed in the innermost structure of human reality. The idea that man is by nature fragile and liable to err is, according to my working hypothesis, an idea wholly accessible to pure reflection; it designates a characteristic of man's being (Ricoeur 1986: 1).

This effort of elucidation reveals a conception of man as a fragile being, since man is constantly exposed to a non-coincidence with himself, a being torn between extremes at the theoretical level, as much as at the practical and emotional levels. Ricoeur's project is then to understand the possibility of evil (but not its actuality) through this flaw that tears the heart of man. This is the reason why Ricoeur, like Jaspers, develops a paradoxical ontology, that is to say a reflection that confronts the heartbreaks and the paradoxes of the voluntary and the involuntary, consent and necessity, freedom and nature, finite and infinite, that are found in the heart of every human being.

However, the most important thing is that these heartbreaks and paradoxes are not the last words of this "little ontology". Indeed, this paradoxical ontology is animated by the hope of a "reconciled ontology". If this is the case, it is because man maintains the hope that his non-coincidence with himself is not a final statement. The human being, facing Transcendence, aspires to a reconciliation with himself. He hopes that in spite of all the evil and suffering, something else can triumph. Beyond the paradoxes of non-coincidence, the unity of man remains a mystery. But more than a vague hope, this reconciled ontology constitutes in fact, according to Ricoeur, the condition of the possibility of a paradoxical ontology that would not simply be ruinous: "A paradoxical ontology is possible only if it is covertly reconciled" (Ricoeur 1966: 19).⁵ This hope is nothing else than the relationship of man to Transcendence. This is what makes this ontology a bifocal ontology. There is a hope in man that, despite everything, God could save us and that grace prevails: "Hope says: the world is not the *final* home of freedom; I consent as much as possible, but hope to be delivered of the terrible and at the end of time to enjoy a new body and a new nature granted to freedom" (Ricoeur 1966: 480 (Ricoeur underlines)).

⁴For a more detailed presentation of the meaning of this hermeneutics of the symbols: J. Grondin (2013: 57–74).

⁵The same idea is exposed at the end of *Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l'existence* (Ricoeur and Dufrenne 1947: 379–393).

Conclusion

Before his opposition between a short route and a long route, Ricoeur was therefore initially considering the ontological question according to the distinction between unifocal and bifocal approaches. This distinction is not only useful to shed light on the difference between the works of Heidegger and Jaspers, on the one hand, and those of Sartre and Marcel, on the other hand. We saw that the ambitious project of the *Philosophy of the Will* was based on the idea of a bifocal ontology and was directly inspired by the philosophies of Jaspers and Marcel. Ricoeur developed a paradoxical ontology of fallibility, of disproportion or non-coincidence with oneself, but still animated by the sight of a reconciled ontology. This reconciled ontology only makes sense, however, in faith and hope in divine Transcendence. Moreover, we note that the early works on Jaspers and Marcel already contain many topics to which Ricoeur will return at different times in his work. One thinks in particular of the themes of hope, promise, attestation and incompleteness. But, with regard to the best way to approach the ontological question and the religious question, Ricoeur's thought will experience major changes. In *The Conflict of Interpretations*, a new way of thinking the relationship between phenomenology, hermeneutics and reflexive philosophy to the question of being will arise with the contrast between the short route and long route. And several other significant developments will come in the works that will follow. Each of these developments will be explained in relation with Heidegger's work, while references to Jaspers and Marcel will be increasingly rare. Moreover, without abandoning the religious question, the thought of Ricoeur will restrict it to a more circumscribed space, seeking as much as possible to offer a philosophical analysis independent of any religious faith, or proposing what he called with Pierre Thévenaz a "philosophy without absolute". From this point of view, Ricoeur seems to have gradually aligned himself with the idea of a unifocal approach to the ontological question which imposes a methodical agnosticism on his philosophical works and reserves, as much as possible, religious reflection for his works on biblical hermeneutics.

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Distanciation and *Epoché*: The Influence of Husserl on Ricoeur's Hermeneutics

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Abstract Ricoeur's concept of distanciation is central to his critical hermeneutics. This paper argues that this concept gets its critical potential from its relationship to Husserl's notion of the *epoché*. The *epoché* entails a bracketing of the natural attitude that inaugurates the phenomenological attitude. From this vantage point one can see that the sense of reality is given through a synthesis of the actual and the possible. Thus, the *epoché* opens up the dimension of the possible in the real, and this in turn opens up the space for the imagination to engage in eidetic variation. These elements of the *epoché* are echoed in Ricoeur's treatment of distanciation as opening up a second order reference through which a text proposes a world. The text exposes the reader not only to other possible worlds, but other possible ways of being, thus affording a perspective from which one can question current ways of being.

Keywords Distanciation • *Epoché* • Ricoeur • Husserl • Imagination • Critical hermeneutics

In "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics" Ricoeur asks how one is to do phenomenology after the hermeneutic turn, and responds: "Whatever may be the dependence of the following meditation on Heidegger and above all on Gadamer, what is at stake is the possibility of continuing to do philosophy with them and after them – without forgetting Husserl" (Ricoeur 1981: 101). What does it mean 'not to forget Husserl'? More specifically, what does it mean not to forget Husserl if we must, as Ricoeur also maintains, overcome the idealist interpretation of phenomenology (Ricoeur 1981: 101)? Since it is often assumed that Husserl's phenomenology and idealism are synonymous, and since those who reject idealism usually reject Husserl in favor of the existential phenomenologies of Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur's claim is striking, and so the question presses: What does it mean not to

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forget Husserl if one is to reject idealism?¹ Ricoeur's task in the essay is to show that phenomenology and hermeneutics are implicated in such a way that each presupposes the other. While most scholars addressing the question of the relation between phenomenology and hermeneutics focus on the details of this discussion (Davidson 2013; Risser 2000; Venema 2000), Ricoeur's argument here is largely programmatic. To arrive at a more concrete sense of what it means not to forget Husserl requires looking more carefully at how Ricoeur retrieves elements of Husserl's phenomenology and at the role played by Husserlian concepts in his hermeneutics.

I will argue that the question of continuing with Heidegger and Gadamer without forgetting Husserl is related to the position that Ricoeur takes on the Gadamer-Habermas debate.² Much of this debate has to do with Habermas's objection to Gadamer's position that understanding entails a fusion of horizons that involves accepting the texts of a tradition as authoritative and seeing oneself as belonging to the tradition shaped by these texts. Habermas sees this position as a conservative one that limits the possibility of a critique of the tradition, and when Ricoeur enters the debate he finds himself in significant agreement with Habermas against Gadamer on this point. To critique the tradition one must be able to stand at a distance from it. Yet Gadamer's hermeneutics tends to stress that this distance from texts of the tradition is due to our historical displacement from them, and that to understand them we must overcome this alienating distance in order to see ourselves as belonging to the tradition that they represent. Although Ricoeur agrees with Habermas that Gadamer's hermeneutics offers few resources for critique, he disagrees that this is true for all hermeneutics. It is possible to develop a hermeneutics that is capable of a critique of ideology (Ricoeur 1981: 63). But it will require viewing interpretation as a dialectic between distanciation and belonging, and thus showing that distanciation is not something negative to be overcome (Ricoeur 1981: 90). Ricoeur will argue instead that distanciation is both a necessary condition of interpretation since interpreting something requires stepping back from it and a positive consequence of

¹I will not directly engage the issue of idealism in this paper. For Ricoeur it is important to retrieve elements of Husserl's phenomenology that have been obscured by his own idealist self-interpretation (Ricoeur 1974: 155). That interpretation reaches its apex, according to Ricoeur, in *Cartesian Meditations* where Husserl conflates an important insight about intentionality, namely, that things appear as phenomena 'for me' and thus as meanings for the claim that these appearances come 'from me' (Ricoeur 1967: 88–9; Ricoeur 1981: 124–5). The idealist interpretation resides in the latter claim since it implies that the world is constituted in transcendental subjectivity. But for Ricoeur this really betrays the fundamental idea of intentionality which is that consciousness is always consciousness of something, meaning that intentions are always about something, they always have an object which cannot be reduced to a content of consciousness. For Ricoeur this means that consciousness is always directed outside of itself (Ricoeur 1981: 115). Thus, consciousness is always of something before it is self-consciousness, which means that self-understanding will always be mediated through the world and the meanings that we find there (Ricoeur 1991: 13, 15).

²Ricoeur engages this debate most directly in "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology." For some discussion of this debate and Ricoeur's stance on it, see Mootz and Taylor (2011).

it since the interpreter is transformed by the broadened self-understanding that results.³

Most commentators agree that this notion of distanciation is central to Ricoeur's conception of a critical hermeneutics, though there is disagreement about whether his position really represents a significant advance over Gadamer.⁴ My aim is to show that Ricoeur's positive reformulation of distanciation owes a great deal to not forgetting Husserl. The point of departure for this argument is Ricoeur's claim that distanciation is like an *epoché*. A closer examination of this notion of the *epoché* in Husserl's phenomenology and the work that it does there will provide resources for clarifying how Ricoeur's notion of distanciation is indebted to Husserl. In particular, distanciation refers to a suspension of our immersion in the world, which opens us up to the world proposed by the text as a realm of the possible. It enables us to see reality as a synthesis of the actual and the possible, thus allowing us to imagine other alternatives. In this regard distanciation opens up the dimension of the possible from which the critique that Habermas misses in Gadamer's hermeneutics can be enacted. The thrust of the argument is, then, that the critical potential of Ricoeur's hermeneutics stems from the resources drawn from Husserl's phenomenology. It should perhaps also be noted at the outset that although the notion of distanciation plays a role in all interpretation for Ricoeur, the focus in this discussion is its function in the interpretation of fictional works.

Distanciation

Though Ricoeur discusses distanciation in many places, the most direct elaboration of the notion occurs in "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation." In this essay multiple dimensions of the phenomenon are identified, but it can be helpful to group these around two themes: writing and reading.⁵

The place of distanciation in writing is fairly straightforward. Writing is a further development of an exteriorization of meaning that is already present in speech. In considering speech one can distinguish between the act or event of speaking – the

³See also "The Task of Hermeneutics": "*How is it possible to introduce a critical distance into a consciousness of belonging which is expressly defined by a rejection of distanciation? It is possible, in my view, only insofar as historical consciousness seeks not simply to repudiate distanciation but to assume it*" (Ricoeur 1981: 61).

⁴For instance, Westphal (2011) thinks the difference between the two positions is exaggerated and that most of the resources for distanciation in Ricoeur's sense are already available in Gadamer. Ritivoi (2011) takes the opposite position.

⁵Smith (1987) has suggested that Ricoeur has two senses of distanciation which roughly follow this distinction. One sense pertains to the autonomy of the text vis-à-vis the author and his or her world, and a second sense is identified that is more like Gadamer's sense of distanciation, i.e. as a distance that the reader has to overcome. I do not entirely agree with this characterization, especially of the latter, as will become clear below. It is, however, helpful to group Ricoeur's multiple moments of distanciation into two basic categories.

utterance or saying, and what is said – the content or meaning. Thus, even with speech there is a first moment of distanciation between the saying which is tied to the speaker and the meaning of what is said (Ricoeur 1981: 132–5). This distanciation is intensified in the case of writing because what is written, the text, achieves a kind of autonomy from both the author and his or her world (Ricoeur 1981: 136–40). Thus, the text is able to transcend “the psycho-social conditions of production” (Ricoeur 1981: 139). The effect of distanciation is that the meaning of the text can be considered independently and on its own terms.

Ricoeur’s rejection of the view of interpretation proposed by Romantic hermeneutics is evident here. According to that model, texts are expressions of the subjectivity of the author, and so a text’s meaning lies in the author’s thoughts and intentions. Thus the goal of interpretation would be to enter into the mind of the author ‘behind’ the text (Ricoeur 1981: 93, 113, 140), or perhaps to situate the text in its world so that it can be understood as the original audience would have understood it (Ricoeur 1981: 190). Ricoeur resists these moves, insisting on the autonomy of the text which enables the reader to attend to the world of the text, not as the world that produced the text – the saying, but as the world that is opened up by the text – the said. In other words, the text proposes a world (Ricoeur 1981: 142–3, 186). This is particularly true for works of fiction.

This brings us to the place of distanciation in reading. It has been suggested that Ricoeur, much like Gadamer, presents distanciation as something to be overcome through reading (Smith 1987). Ricoeur does occasionally make claims that seem to support such an interpretation: “In short the text must be able from the sociological as well as the psychological point of view to ‘decontextualize’ itself in such a way that it can be ‘recontextualized’ in a new situation – as accomplished, precisely, by the act of reading” (Ricoeur 1981: 139). Such recontextualization, which Ricoeur terms appropriation, is often presented as an act performed by the reader in which the initially alien meaning of the text is made ‘one’s own’ (Ricoeur 1981: 185). But to see distanciation as something that is only overcome in reading or appropriation is to miss a distanciation that is actually effected through reading, and without this an important component of the critical capacity of hermeneutics would be lost. In particular, Ricoeur emphasizes that in reading the reader becomes distanced from his or her self and his or her world. He writes: “Appropriation is also and primarily a ‘letting-go’. Reading is an appropriation-divestiture ... It is in allowing itself to be carried off toward the reference of the text that *ego* divests itself of itself” (Ricoeur 1981: 191).⁶

It was noted above that in writing the text becomes distanced from both the author and his or her cultural, historical world. But the text also proposes a world, and to propose a world is to propose another possible reality. Ricoeur writes that

⁶See also “Appropriation” and “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation”: “In reading it is always a question of entering into an alien work, or divesting oneself of the earlier ‘me’ in order to receive, as in play, the self confined by the work itself” (Ricoeur 1981: 190); “For the metamorphosis of the ego ... implies a moment of distanciation of self to itself; hence understanding is as much disappropriation as appropriation” (Ricoeur 1981: 144).

“the power of the text to open a dimension of reality implies in principle a recourse against any given reality and thereby the possibility of a critique of the real” (Ricoeur 1981: 93). In other words, the world of the text stands at a distance not just from the world of the author but of any actual world, including that of the reader. In reading, then, one engages with the text by understanding it as presenting other worlds and other ways of existing that might be possibilities for oneself. Ricoeur writes: “what is interpreted in a text is a *proposed world* which I could inhabit and wherein I could project one of my ownmost possibilities” (Ricoeur 1981: 142). As he often says, to understand is not just to understand the text but to understand oneself in front of the text and thus “it is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity of understanding but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self ...” (Ricoeur 1981: 143). In other words reading exposes the reader to other possible ways of being. In so doing it distances the reader from his or her world and transforms the reader, effecting a distanciation within the reader, i.e., within the self. This is a rich and complicated point which will be explored in more depth below. For now it suffices to establish that reading does not just overcome distanciation; it effects a distanciation.

That the text proposes a world that is distanced from the respective worlds of the writer and the reader is important because of the possibility of critique that it affords. On the one hand, as just noted, the world of the text opens a dimension of reality that outstrips the actual and therefore presents a vantage point for critique of the actual world. But since the world of the text engages the reader by presenting possible ways of being *for the reader*, the text also affords possibilities for self-critique. For Ricoeur this power of the text is achieved paradigmatically by the work of fiction, which is characterized by a distinctive reference structure.

Ricoeur describes the fictional work as having what he calls a second order reference. He develops this concept through an adaptation of Frege's distinction between sense and reference. Frege's original distinction pertains to expressions. The reference is what the proposition is about (e.g. some object that it is directed toward and that can serve as a truth condition for the expression), while the sense is the meaning through which it is presented. Ricoeur extends this distinction to apply to texts such that the sense of a text has to do with its structure and internal organization, while its reference has to do with the ‘matter of the text,’ what it is about (Ricoeur 1981: 93, 111).⁷ The reference of the text is particularly important for Ricoeur because it is through the reference that the text applies to reality.

Against the objection that fictional works cannot have a reference precisely because they are fictional, Ricoeur replies that such works have a kind of second order reference (Ricoeur 1981: 112, 141). A first order reference would be a reference to the actual world, as one might find for example in a work of non-fiction. But the second order reference is a reference to a proposed world, i.e. one that is possible. In other words, it is a world that has been placed at a distance from the world of first order reference, and for this second order reference to be opened up, the first order reference must be suspended. “The strategy of this [poetic] discourse involves

⁷Or, as he writes in one place, “the mode of being unfolded in front of the text” (Ricoeur 1981: 93).

holding two moments in equilibrium: suspending the reference of ordinary language and releasing a second order reference, which is another name for what we have designated above as the world opened up by the work” (Ricoeur 1981: 93).⁸ Thus, the second order reference opens up the proposed world that can serve as the dimension from which the world indicated in the first order reference can be critiqued.

The idea of second order reference is pivotal for suggesting how Ricoeur’s appropriation of Husserlian phenomenology is relevant to his response to the Gadamer-Habermas debate. Ricoeur argues that a hermeneutics that emphasizes distanciation can accommodate a critique of ideology. But he also says that “hermeneutical distanciation is not unrelated to the phenomenological *epoché*” (Ricoeur 1981: 116). The notion of the *epoché* is drawn from Husserlian phenomenology and is suggestively linked to the notion of suspension to which Ricoeur frequently alludes when talking about second order reference. My suggestion is that there is a connection between Ricoeur’s concept of distanciation and his claim in “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics” that we not forget Husserl.

Epoché

To explore this suggestion, we must turn our attention to Husserl. Since the point of departure for our reflections here is Ricoeur’s provocative claim that distanciation is like an *epoché*, it is with this latter concept that we must begin.

When we examine the *epoché* in Husserl’s phenomenology, we see three features of it that appear to be important for a consideration of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. First, *epoché* is the term Husserl uses to refer to the suspension or bracketing of the natural attitude toward the world (Husserl 1998: 56; Husserl 1991: 20). In this regard it is closely associated with the phenomenological reduction (Husserl 1991: 21).⁹ Lived experience has an intentional structure such that we are always directed meaningfully toward objects and the world. In the natural attitude, we are simply absorbed in that experience (Husserl 1998: 51–57). To enter the phenomenological attitude from which this intentional structure can be examined as such, it is necessary to suspend or bracket the natural attitude. This phenomenological reduction is supposed to allow us to focus on intentional relations and how things are meant rather than simply being absorbed with the things meant. The suspension or bracketing of the *epoché* thus allows us to shift our attention from the objects as such to how they are given as phenomena. The first important point to draw then regarding the *epoché* is that it involves a suspension that enables the shift from the natural attitude to the transcendental-phenomenological attitude.

⁸ For a discussion of the role of metaphor in the constitution of second order reference, see Venema (2000).

⁹ Bossert (1974) argues that the *epoché* is the means by which the reduction is accomplished.

In bracketing the world as we experience it in the natural attitude, the *epoché* makes it possible to analyze the structures of consciousness and opens up a realm of transcendental experience which can then be analyzed (Husserl 1991: 27). In the first instance, what is revealed from the phenomenological attitude is that intentional experience is comprised of noetic-noematic correlates, and under the conditions of the reduction, it is possible to analyze the sense associated with these noema and their correlated noeses. Analysis reveals that any noema that has an objective sense is given as a synthesis of the actual and the potential, and what this ultimately means is that the *epoché* opens us up to the realm of transcendental experience as a realm of the possible. This is the second important point.

To say that something has an objective sense is to say that it is experienced as objective, and that it is given as having a validity that persists beyond the actual moment of experience for that subject. To illustrate, consider the case of perception. When one perceives some object, one understands it as a transcendent object that has an independent existence such that one experiences it as remaining identical through changing perceptual experiences (Husserl 1998: 86). Another way to put this is that transcendent objects are only perceived through profiles, and yet one always understands them as exceeding the particular profile that is directly apprehended or presented. In perception although one sees only one side of the object, the perceptual intention is directed at the object as a whole which has other sides that are not genuinely seen at the moment, but could be if, say, one walks around the object or turns it to present another side. The other sides of the object are not, however, simply absent. They are there for consciousness in some sense; they are co-meant (Husserl 1998: 94; Husserl 2001: 40). Husserl indicates that the sides that are not seen are given through a kind of empty intention because they are referred to by the side that is given (Husserl 2001: 41).¹⁰ Husserl attributes the givenness of these emptily intended sides to a horizontal intentionality. In *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis* he writes: "... everything that genuinely appears is an appearing thing only by virtue of being surrounded by a halo of emptiness with respect to appearance" (Husserl 2001: 42). But he goes on to say that this emptiness is not just nothingness; it is an emptiness to be filled out, and to be filled out in a particular manner. Thus, though the emptiness is indeterminate, it is given not only as determinable but as determinable in a particular way.¹¹ In other words, the horizon is a

¹⁰"It is clear that a non-intuitive pointing beyond or indicating is what characterizes the side actually seen as a mere side, and what provides for the fact that the side is not taken for the thing, but rather, that something transcending the side is intended in consciousness as perceived, by which precisely *that* is actually seen. Noetically speaking, perception is a mixture of an actual exhibiting that presents in an intuitive manner what is originally exhibited, and of an empty indicating that refers to possible new perceptions. In a noematic regard, what is perceived is given in adumbrations in such a way that the particular givenness refers to something else that is not-given, as what is not given belonging to the same object" (Husserl 2001: 41). "In every moment of perceiving, the perceived is what it is in its mode of appearance [as] a system of referential implications [*Verweisen*] with an appearance-core upon which appearances have their hold" (Husserl 2001: 41).

¹¹"It is an emptiness that is not a nothingness, but an emptiness to be filled out; it is a determinable indeterminacy" (Husserl 2001: 42). "... *every actuality involves its potentialities*, which are not

halo of indeterminate determinacy that surrounds an object (Husserl 1998: 51–2, 157; Husserl 2001: 42; Husserl 1991: 44–5), and prefigures the appearances that would be made if they were to be actualized (Husserl 1991: 44; Husserl 2001: 42).¹² In the case of perception, what is prefigured are other possible perceptual experiences. What I want to suggest is that the sense of the intentional object, which in this example is a perceived object, prefigures certain possibilities for that object or for how that object can be experienced.¹³ One of those possibilities corresponds to the actual present experience, but the others are located in the horizons. According to Husserl what is true for the objective sense of the object here is also true for the objective sense of the world (Husserl 1991: 62).

Intentional analysis, which is made possible by the *epoché*, discloses that even though we appear to be directed only toward the actual in the natural attitude, we are in fact directed at a whole which is comprised of the unity of the actual and the possible (Husserl 1991: 44–46). Thus intentions always ‘mean’ more than they mean (Husserl 1991: 46). From this perspective afforded by the *epoché* it becomes possible to explicate the “*potentialities ‘implicit’ in [the] actualities of consciousness*” (Husserl 1991: 46).

Why might it be important to explicate the potentialities implicit in the actualities of consciousness? Well, for Husserl, to apprehend what something is requires grasping not just how it appears in some particular appearance or presentation or even generalizing from some number of appearances. What is required is to grasp something in terms of its possible appearances. So for instance to know what a triangle is, it is not sufficient to know that some particular object is a triangle. One would need to be able to grasp the ‘essence’ or *eidōs* across possible variations. Suppose I am presented with an equilateral triangle, and I judge that it is a triangle. But then suppose that I am presented with a right triangle, and I judge that it is not a triangle. Even though I may have thought I knew what a triangle was, we would say that I did not really know after all because I could not grasp what it is across possible variations.

So how does one arrive at this grasp of what something is? Husserl’s answer is eidetic variation. Eidetic variation is the method through which we arrive what Husserl calls ‘essential seeing’, namely a grasp of an ‘essence’ or *eidōs* (Husserl 1973: 340–8; Husserl 1998: 156–60). Despite his use of this term, these are not Platonic essences (Lohmar 2005). The first thing to recognize is that the *eidōs* is a

empty possibilities but rather possibilities intentionally predelineated with respect to content” (Husserl 1991: 44).

¹²“In spite of its emptiness, the sense of this halo of consciousness is a prefiguring that prescribes a rule for the transition to new actualizing appearances” (Husserl 2001: 42).

¹³This idea is also suggested by Welton (2000). Gyllenhammer (2001) argues that there are problems with Husserl’s account of intentional fulfillment in *Logical Investigations* that Ricoeur’s theory of narrative solves. One worry he has is that Husserl’s account requires that the object be prefigured in order for there to be fulfillment, and he does not think that Husserl has the resources to deal with this. But the analysis here shows that Husserl’s account of horizontal intentionality, which is developed in texts other than the ones Gyllenhammer considers provides resources for addressing this concern.

kind of universal that is given through a synthesis of actual and possible presentations of particulars much as in perception an object that can only be given in profiles is apprehended as a synthesis of actual and possible presentations. Eidetic variation is the method for reaching beyond some particular through a consideration of other particular possibilities in order to arrive at the *eidōs*. The procedure involves what Husserl calls free variation (Husserl 1973: 340). One begins with some exemplary case. Then one arbitrarily varies its features in order to imaginatively produce other possibilities to see which are compossible and which are not. One attempts to discern among these possibilities the similarities that ground the differences in order to identify which features are invariant and which are variable. The invariant structures, the ones that recur in all the possible variations, are then explicitly recognized as being the *eidōs*. The invariant can be recognized because it functions as a limit on the free play of imagination.¹⁴ So to take the triangle example, the exemplary possibility that I begin with might be of an equilateral triangle. Through the process of free variation, I vary features of the triangle to produce other triangle images. So I might vary the length of the sides, then the magnitude of the angles, and come to see that the specific features of the triangle with which I began are variable, and hence do not belong to the *eidōs*, though this variability is itself grounded in a similarity shared by all the possibilities, namely being a closed figure with three sides.¹⁵ In *Cartesian Meditations* in particular Husserl wants to apply the procedure of eidetic variation to particular noeses such as perception and then ultimately to the ego because his goal is to develop an *a priori* science for all subjective processes (Husserl 1991: 70–1, 84–5). By performing eidetic variation on one's own experience, Husserl argues, one can arrive at the essential structures of any experience whatsoever, i.e. experience structures for the transcendental ego.

The role of imagination in eidetic variation should be highlighted. It is necessary for the figuring of possibilities which is central to the method, and for this reason Husserl indicates that one can even say that in phenomenology “*free phantasies acquire a position of primacy over perceptions*” (Husserl 1998: 158–9). Since actual perceptions are limited, it is only in the realm of fantasy or imagination that one has the freedom to consider a more expansive domain of possibilities. Without being able to explore possibilities freely in the imagination, it seems unlikely that one would be able to arrive at any grasp of essences at all,¹⁶ which is why Husserl writes that “fiction makes up the vital element of phenomenology as of every other eidetic

¹⁴ See also (Husserl 1998: 157–160). For some discussion of this and other methodological features of Husserl's phenomenology, see Held (2003).

¹⁵ In *Ideas* Husserl uses an example from geometry while in *Experience and Judgment* he uses examples of sound, i.e. that no matter what variations one makes to other features (e.g. tone, pitch, etc.) one encounters the same *eidōs*, ‘sound in general,’ over and over (Husserl 1998: 159; Husserl 1973: 341–2).

¹⁶ This is why eidetic variation as a method is understood by Husserl to be an advance over basic induction. See Levin (1968) and Lohmar (2005).

science, ... fiction is the source from which the cognition of 'eternal truths' is fed" (Husserl 1998: 160).¹⁷

Although Husserl believes that eidetic variation reveals essences that are universal, and that it reveals them with certainty, it has been argued convincingly that this cannot really be the case. Lohmar (2005) argues that at least some essences that are disclosed through this method would have to be seen as culturally laden. It has also been argued that this procedure cannot generate certainty because doing so would require running through infinite possibilities, which is not possible (Levin 1968).¹⁸ Ricoeur has raised a version of this objection against Husserl's claims regarding the results of eidetic variation on the ego specifically (Ricoeur 1981: 109–10).¹⁹

Although such criticisms are valid, they do not detract from the crucial point that eidetic variation as a procedure involves imaginative extrapolation from actual particulars, understood as one possibility among others, to other possibilities. On the basis of that imaginative free play among possibilities, one arrives at a deeper sense of what something is by way of a richer sense of the possibilities that pertain to it as well as the limits within which these possibilities can be defined. This point is not diminished by the fact that this deeper sense remains provisional and rooted in a world. In fact, it seems that the sense of the possibilities imagined is richer for this limitation. Furthermore, the idea offered here of exercising the procedure of eidetic variation with respect to oneself is suggestive. Just as one might break with the actual in order to imagine other possibilities with respect to something in order to get a better sense of what it is, so can one do this with respect to oneself. Again, that the deeper sense of oneself might remain provisional and rooted in a world does not seem to detract from its value.

The third point then, which must be added to the other two, is that the *epoché* makes possible eidetic variation. The *epoché* involves a suspension of the natural attitude which inaugurates the phenomenological attitude. From the perspective of this attitude, the world is opened up as a sphere of possibility, and this in turn makes it possible to engage in eidetic variation through which we arrive at a richer and deeper understanding of things and possibly also of ourselves by way of an analysis of these possibilities.

¹⁷Translation modified. "...dass die 'Fiktion' das Lebenselement der Phänomenologie, wie aller eidetischen Wissenschaft, ausmacht, dass Fiktion die Quelle ist, aus der die Erkenntnis der 'ewigen Wahrheiten' ihre Nahrung zieht" (Husserl 1976: 132).

¹⁸Cases involving mathematics might be an exception to this point about certainty, but only because certainty here would not necessitate running through infinite possibilities. For an example of using eidetic variation in mathematics, see Tieszen (2005).

¹⁹Because Husserl thinks the ego is given immanently, he thinks certainty is achievable here. Ricoeur rejects this claim, maintaining that the ego can only be given in profiles like any other transcendent object.

Distanciation as *Epoché*

Having now discussed some elements of Husserl's phenomenology as they are opened up by the notion of the *epoché*, we are in a better position to consider the full complexity of Ricoeur's claim that distanciation is like an *epoché*. The first point is that the *epoché* suspends the natural attitude. In Husserl the natural attitude is characterized by an immersion in the lifeworld such that we simply live through our intentional relations to the world and to things in it. In engaging meaningfully with the world, we focus on the things and not on our mode of access to them or how it is that we intend them. The *epoché* brackets the natural attitude so that we can redirect our attention away from objects and toward the intentional relations through which they are given as signifying in the way that they do. As Ricoeur writes, it is through this phenomenological attitude that meaning can appear as meaning (Ricoeur 1981: 116).

Ricoeur's evocation of the *epoché* in connection with distanciation is repeated and deliberate. In "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics" he writes "hermeneutical distanciation is to belonging as, in phenomenology, the *epoché* is to lived experience" (Ricoeur 1981: 117).²⁰ In other places he uses the language of suspension in ways that clearly imply the *epoché*. For instance, in both "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics" and "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation" he speaks of fictional discourse as 'suspending' a first order reference that discloses the world as a realm of 'manipulable objects' and thereby releases a second order reference that discloses the lifeworld and our being-in-the-world.²¹ Thus in distanciation there is a bracketing of the everyday world of our lived experience, which is intended through the first order reference, and this distancing opens us up to the world proposed by the text through second order reference.

But the connection Ricoeur draws between the suspension associated with the *epoché* and the suspension of a first order reference gives rise to an ambiguity. To which world are we exposed in distanciation? On the one hand, if we follow the idea of the *epoché* fairly strictly, what distanciation should do is open us up to the world as it is meant. As a result of distanciation we should be able to suspend the immersion in the world typical of the natural attitude and assume something like the phenomenological attitude, and from this perspective we should be able to look at our world under the conditions of the reduction with an eye toward how it comes to signify as it does. In this case, one is not directed at a different world, but the same

²⁰This is in addition to the passage at (Ricoeur 1981: 116) cited earlier.

²¹"It is precisely insofar as fictional discourse 'suspends' its first order referential function that it releases a second order reference, where the world is manifested no longer as the totality of manipulable objects but as the horizon of our life and our project, in short as *Lebenswelt* [life-world], as being-in-the-world" (Ricoeur 1981: 112). "My thesis here is that the abolition of a first order reference, an abolition effected by fiction and poetry, is the condition of possibility for the freeing of a second order reference, which reaches the world not only at the level of manipulable objects, but at the level that Husserl designated by the expression *Lebenswelt* [life-world] and Heidegger by the expression 'being-in-the-world'" (Ricoeur 1981: 141). For a somewhat different take on the connection between suspension and *epoché*, see Kirkland (1977: 140–1).

world viewed through a different attitude. On the other hand, Ricoeur also says that the first order reference relates to the actual world, while the second order reference is to a possible world. This gives the impression that the world opened up by the text is a different world and that in distancing we are distanced from our world not just in the sense that our immersion in it is bracketed but in the sense that we are exposed to an entirely different world. So which is it? Does the second order reference open us up to a different world, or are we opened up to the same world differently?

It might be argued that the problem indicated here is due to an overly rigid interpretation of how Ricoeur uses the term *epoché*. Perhaps Ricoeur simply means it as a heuristic device to contrast the first and second order reference points, and we ought not to take it as a real shift to a kind of phenomenological attitude. Ricoeur's text resists this interpretation however. Closer examination of the same passages where he characterizes distancing as an *epoché* makes it clear that he means it in the phenomenological sense: "phenomenology begins when, not content to 'live' or 're-live,' we interrupt lived experience in order to signify it" (Ricoeur 1981: 116); "It [the *epoché*] renders thematic what was only operative, and thereby makes meaning appear as meaning" (Ricoeur 1981: 116); "Hermeneutics similarly begins when, not content to belong to transmitted tradition, we interrupt the relation of belonging in order to signify it" (Ricoeur 1981: 117). These passages make clear that Ricoeur understands the *epoché* as that which brings the phenomenological attitude to bear. So we are left with the question: does the fictional work present us with a different world, or with our own world under conditions of the phenomenological attitude?

Consideration of the second point regarding the *epoché* allows us to conclude that it is the latter. The suspension of the natural attitude opens up the world as a sphere of the possible, and this occurs because the *epoché* allows one to see that the intentionality through which we are directed at things in fact directs us toward more than what is directly given in actuality, but also directs us at horizontal possibilities that flesh out and give fuller meaning to that at which we are directed in a narrower sense. Thus, what the perspective afforded by the *epoché* allows us to see is that the sense of what is objectively real is always a synthesis of the actual and the possible. So the *epoché* discloses for us the place of the possible in the real.

In discussing the worlds proposed by texts, Ricoeur emphasizes that these worlds, as fictional worlds, are produced by the imagination, and as such are based on images drawn from the same reality that they neutralize (Ricoeur 1991: 174). Thus, the possible world that is intimated is always possible in relation to the actual, i.e. the actual provides resources for prefiguring the possible, and the imagination is able to envisage the possible guided by these resources. Does this mean that the world disclosed as possible is disclosed as a different world? Yes and no. Ricoeur writes that "worlds are proposed in the mode of play" (Ricoeur 1981: 186), and in play "everyday reality is abolished" (Ricoeur 1981: 187) through the suspension of the first order reference, but, and this is crucial, "'what is' is no longer what we call everyday reality; or rather reality truly becomes reality; that is, something which comprises a future horizon of undecided possibilities, something to fear or to hope for, something unsettled" (Ricoeur 1981: 187). In other words, what we take to be

reality in the natural attitude – namely the actual alone – is in fact not truly reality because the *sense* of reality is achieved through a synthesis of the actual and the possible. And though we are directed at the object of this synthesis in the natural attitude, we are not aware of it, and take ourselves to be directed only at the actual. Thus, in the play of entertaining a proposed world, we engage with reality in a fuller sense, a sense that includes the possible. As such, the world proposed by the text which is achieved through the distanciation associated with writing is not so much a different world, as a world expanded to encompass its possibilities. In other words, we are directed at the same world; we just come to see it differently.

If the world of the text can show up as a sphere of possibilities that connects with the world of the reader, then what that also indicates is that the reader understands himself or herself in terms of possibilities. In other words, it is not just that the world proposed is possible, but that it presents possible ways of being for the reader. Ricoeur explicitly connects these notions when he writes “what must be interpreted in a text is a *proposed world* which I could inhabit and wherein I could project one of my ownmost possibilities” (Ricoeur 1981: 142). Thus, to understand is to understand oneself in front of the text: “through fiction and poetry, new possibilities of being-in-the-world are opened up within everyday reality. Fiction and poetry intend being, not under the modality of being given, but under the modality of power-to-be” (Ricoeur 1981: 142), that is, under the modality of lived possibility. What Ricoeur is getting at here is that the worlds proposed by the text are proposed as situations or fields of action that figure possibilities for me, and thus in some sense possibilities for being me, i.e. possible selves.

Thus, reading for Ricoeur presents us with the opportunity to play imaginatively not only with other possible worlds, but with other possible ways of being, and thus enables a kind of imaginative variation on the self: “it is in the realm of the imaginary that I try out my power to act, that I measure the scope of ‘I can’. I impute my own power to myself, as the agent of my own action, only by depicting it to myself in the form of imaginative variations on the theme, ‘I could,’ even ‘I could have done otherwise, if I had wanted to’” (Ricoeur 1991: 178). In other words I come to know myself as a ‘power-to-be’ only through engaging in a kind of imaginative variation with the aid of the fictional text. Reading affords the opportunity to explore one’s possibilities in the imagination, and in this manner one achieves an ‘enlarged self’. Though Ricoeur is not particularly interested in grasping an ‘essence’ here and would deny that one can ever achieve a full grasp of oneself, one can nevertheless become more certain of oneself through exploration of more possibilities: “what is essential from a phenomenological point of view is that I take possession of the immediate certainty of my power only through the imaginative variations that mediate this certainty” (Ricoeur 1991: 178). Echoing the notion of eidetic variation in Husserl, one can see that as one engages in an imaginative variation of the ego, varying through numerous possibilities for being, what emerges as the invariant structure is that whatever specific possibilities one might imagine, the thing that does not change is that one *is* possibility, that one is an ‘I can’ or ‘power-to-be’. Thus, the distanciation effected in the reader, wherein the reader becomes distanced from his or her self, has two dimensions. First, the reader is opened up to new

possibilities for being on the basis of the proposed world since that proposed world is understood as a modal variation on the actual world and hence as real.²² Second, the reader is opened up to a sense of himself or herself as one for whom there is possibility or, to put it in Heideggerian terms, as *Seinkönnen*.

By elaborating on the *epoché*'s role in Husserl's phenomenology and bringing those resources to bear in considering the claim that distanciation is like an *epoché*, Ricoeur's discussion of distanciation opens up in a richer, more nuanced way. We can see that the distanciation effected through writing 'possibilizes' the actual through a suspension of the everyday world. In doing so it proposes a world that is distanced from the actual world of both writer and reader. But this world is not a different world; it is a possible world, a modal dimension of reality that is sometimes occluded from us by a too narrow understanding of the actual world. In being exposed to this proposed world through reading, the reader is invited to engage in a process of imaginative variation through which one explores other possibilities of being. This process can effect a self-transformation and thus a distanciation within the self.

From Distanciation to Critique

The notion of distanciation that Ricoeur develops affords critique because distanciation is all about opening up the dimension of the possible from which one can get the distance on the actual that is necessary in order to question it, in order to ask why it cannot be otherwise. This opening up of the sphere of the possible allows one to do more than simply negate the actual; it affords the opportunity to imagine other alternatives.²³ Ricoeur contends that distanciation gives his hermeneutics a response to Habermas. I maintain that the resources for distanciation come from phenomenology – from not forgetting Husserl. It is the link Ricoeur draws between distanciation and the phenomenological notion of *epoché* that gives his hermeneutics the resources to address Habermas's concerns.

In order to illustrate the difference that Ricoeur's emphasis on the positive features of distanciation makes, it is instructive to consider Gadamer's view of

²²In commenting on *Cartesian Meditations* in his book on Husserl, Ricoeur notes the importance of imaginative variation in terms similar to those I have been pressing here. He writes: "But phenomenology is also a victory over brute fact by the method of imaginative variation. It is a victory in the direction of the *eidos* accomplished in such a way that the fact is no longer anything but an example of a pure possibility" (Ricoeur 1967: 108). See also p. 91.

²³Thus I agree with Piercey (2011) that having a critical hermeneutics requires being able to distinguish between the imaginary and the real, though I would express the point in terms of a distinction between the actual and the possible because though the imagination plays a role in figuring the possible, those possibilities nevertheless must be grounded in the actual if they are to be real. Piercey is interested in showing how Ricoeur's view of imagination is indebted to Kant whereas I am more interested in showing how Ricoeur appropriates Husserl's phenomenology. This difference no doubt accounts for the different terminology.

hermeneutic understanding and Habermas's objection to it. Gadamer's view builds on Heidegger's notion of understanding in *Being and Time*. Part of Habermas's critique focuses on Gadamer's reading of this particular point in Heidegger and the implications he draws from it. Ricoeur reads Heidegger differently here, and thus, it is worth considering whether his interpretation differs in ways that reflect his view of distanciation as *epoché*.

Heidegger's notion of understanding and its fore-structures is well-known. In *Being and Time* he argues that Dasein never encounters things 'bare,' as it were, but always encounters them through a structure of meaning that it casts before itself and through which things are intelligible (Heidegger 1960: 150). For Gadamer the fore-structures are fore-meanings, i.e. pre-judgments or prejudices, with which one approaches an interpretive situation and which guide interpretation (Gadamer 1989: 268–9). Gadamer writes that "the recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust" (Gadamer 1989: 270). The Enlightenment position is that such prejudices are necessarily distortive and should be eliminated in favor of a more objective view, but for Gadamer Heidegger's analysis of understanding shows that understanding is not possible without presuppositions (Gadamer 1989: 293f). Therefore, there must be legitimate prejudices (Gadamer 1989: 270). One source of these legitimate prejudices is the tradition,²⁴ and Gadamer claims that "belonging to a tradition is a condition of hermeneutics" (Gadamer 1989: 291) because "the anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition" (Gadamer 1989: 293). Thus, tradition is the source of the fore-meanings that guide interpretation, and through interpretation tradition is also extended.²⁵

Habermas highlights these points about understanding and the tradition in his review of *Truth and Method*. He points out that the understanding of tradition that forms these fore-meanings will have been acquired through socialization (Habermas 1977: 343–4). Thus hermeneutic understanding "is a new step of socialization that takes previous socialization as its point of departure. In appropriating tradition, it continues tradition" (Habermas 1977: 344). But the worry here is that this initial socialization is pre-critical, and hermeneutic understanding does not really seem to offer the resources for challenging these assumptions inherited from the tradition. Habermas writes: "Gadamer turns the insight into the structure of prejudgments ... involved in understanding into a rehabilitation of prejudice as such. But does it follow from the unavoidability of hermeneutic anticipation *eo ipso* that there are legitimate prejudices?" (Habermas 1977: 357). Gadamer tries to ground legitimate prejudices in the authority of tradition insofar as it can make true claims to

²⁴Again Gadamer emphasizes that the Enlightenment view sets up a false antithesis between reason and authority, including the authority of the tradition. Such authority can be based on knowledge and therefore have a legitimate claim to truth (Gadamer 1989: 278–80).

²⁵See also: "Hermeneutics must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a bond to the subject matter that comes into language through the traditionary text and has, or acquires, a connection with the tradition from which the text speaks" (Gadamer 1989: 295).

knowledge, but Habermas questions this claim to legitimacy on the grounds that this authority is still not free from the specter of force, and therefore this socialization might amount to an indoctrination through which a false consciousness incapable of ideological critique might be formed.²⁶

Ricoeur largely agrees with Habermas that Gadamer's hermeneutics seems focused on rehabilitating the concept of prejudice, and he suggests that Gadamer falls into this trap because he makes the issue of pre-understanding central to his view of hermeneutics and emphasizes the importance of belonging to a tradition. This prevents his hermeneutics from being able to address the issue of critique adequately, and Ricoeur's own solution to the problem is to reorient hermeneutics to consider the interpretive situation as involving a dialectic between the experiences of belonging and distancing (Ricoeur 1981: 89–90). Thinking about distancing in terms of Husserl's *epoché* is extremely useful in this regard in that it captures both of these moments. In the natural attitude, we are simply immersed in the world; we belong to it. The *epoché* distances us from that immersion by bracketing the natural attitude. What is disclosed through this bracketing or suspension are possibilities – not possibilities that are abstract or detached from reality, but possibilities that can be enacted from out of that reality and which belong to it. These are possibilities for our world, possible ways for us to be.

This way of thinking about possibility is reflected in Ricoeur's interpretation of Heidegger's notion of understanding. What particularly captures his attention is the element of projection that Heidegger associates with it, i.e. that to understand is to project upon a possibility of being from out of a condition of thrownness (Ricoeur 1981: 56). Thus Ricoeur emphasizes that understanding discloses a possibility of being and is described in terms of a 'power-to-be' (Ricoeur 1981: 56). Like Gadamer, Ricoeur comments on the anticipatory character of this understanding such that it involves fore-structures, but what is important for Ricoeur is not what these might project as presuppositions, but what they project as possibilities for being (Ricoeur 1981: 56–7, 107). Referring to *Being and Time* he writes that: "the moment of 'understanding' corresponds dialectically to being in a situation: it is the projection of our ownmost possibilities at the very heart of the situation in which we find ourselves" (Ricoeur 1981: 142). This idea of projecting one's ownmost possibilities is what he wants to retain (Ricoeur 1981: 142) because "the notion of 'the projection of my ownmost possibilities' ... signifies that the mode of being of the world opened up by the text is the mode of the possible, or better of the power-to-be: therein resides the subversive force of the imaginary" (Ricoeur 1981: 93). An understanding oriented toward the 'power-to-be' or toward possibility in this sense is one that is capable of critique.

²⁶"Here the person of the educator legitimates prejudices that are inculcated in the learner with authority – and this means, however we turn around it, under the potential threat of sanctions and with the prospect of gratification. Identification with the model creates the authority that alone makes possible the internalization of norms, the sedimentation of prejudices. The prejudices are in turn the conditions of the possibility of knowledge" (Habermas 1977: 357). Habermas also raises worries about Gadamer's claim to the universality of hermeneutics (see Gadamer 1976), but this aspect of the debate is not the focus here.

Thus, at the very place where Habermas critiques Gadamer, Ricoeur offers a different interpretation, one that foregrounds possibility in a manner consistent with the emphasis on possibility throughout the rest of his hermeneutics. Distanciation opens up the dimension of the possible from which critical interpretation and understanding can be enacted. This way of thinking about distanciation is indebted to Husserl's notion of the *epoché*. Thus, perhaps, we get some sense for what it might mean to continue to do hermeneutics but without forgetting Husserl.

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Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricoeur

Richard Kearney

Keywords Paul Ricoeur • Phenomenology • Hermeneutics • Body • Flesh

Paul Ricoeur developed a phenomenology of flesh inspired by Husserl in the 1950s. But while this early phenomenology was developing strongly in the direction of a diagnostics of carnal signification—in tandem with Merleau-Ponty—once Ricoeur took the so-called “linguistic turn” in the 1960s he departed from this seminal phenomenology in order to concentrate more exclusively on a hermeneutics of the text. There are, however, some fascinating reflections in Ricoeur’s final writings which attempt to reanimate a dialogue between his initial phenomenology of the flesh and later hermeneutics of language. I will take a look at these by way of suggesting new directions for a carnal hermeneutics—directions which might bring together the rich insights of a philosophy of embodiment (developed with Husserl and Merleau-Ponty) and a philosophy of interpretation (deriving from Heidegger and Gadamer).

Before looking at these later reflections, however, let me say a few words about Ricoeur’s early “diagnostics” of bodily expression. As I have written on this elsewhere, I will confine my remarks here to a few summary points.

Diagnosics of the Body

Ricoeur’s main contribution here comes in the form of three important sections of his first major work in phenomenology, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, published in 1950, 5 years after *The Phenomenology of Perception*. The sections in question are entitled, “Motivation and the Corporeal Involuntary,” “Bodily Spontaneity” and “Life: Structure, Growth, Genesis, Birth.”

Ricoeur sets out in this work to explore the life of the “incarnate cogito,” drawing on the phenomenological notion of the *corps propre* (announced by Husserl and

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Merleau-Ponty), Gabriel Marcel's notion of incarnation, and Maine de Biran's analysis of the embodied cogito (as touch, effort, and resistance). From the outset Ricoeur proposes an account of the body as a dialectical rapport between the voluntary and the involuntary in direct opposition to naturalism. Starting with the phenomenon of "affectivity," he notes that "*sentir est encore penser*," understanding *sentir* no longer as a representation of objectivity but as a revelation of existence (Ricoeur 1950: 86). Carnal affectivity is thus seen as a mediating bridge between (i) our flesh and blood existence and (ii) the "thinking" order of interpretation, evaluation and understanding. But if "incarnation" is the first anchor of existence, it is also the temptation of betrayal—for the affective body lends itself to reductive objectifying accounts.

Ricoeur takes up the challenge, beginning with "need" as something to be phenomenologically experienced not as a natural event from without, but as a lived experience from within. It is here, right away, that Ricoeur proclaims his diagnostics of the lived body:

The diagnostic relation which conjoins objective knowledge with Cogito's apperception brings about a truly Copernican Revolution. No longer is consciousness a symptom of the object-body, but rather the object-body is an indication of a personal body (*corps propre*) in which the Cogito shares as its very existence (Ricoeur 1950: 87–8).

Affectivity and thought are thus connected from the outset by a tie of mutual inherence and adherence. The two bodies (inner and outer) are not separate realities but two ways of "reading" the same flesh—externally (as nature) and internally (as incarnation).

Ricoeur then goes on to show how need relates to pleasure in terms of various "motivating values and tendencies"—evaluative discriminations that are not imposed by consciousness or reason but are already operative in our most basic affective relations. Nor is need to be reduced, naturalistically, to a mere reflex sensation translating an organic defect in the form of a motor reaction. It is not a "reaction but a pre-action"—an "action towards..." (Ricoeur 1950: 91). Otherwise put, need reveals me not as a mechanism of stimulus–response but as a "life gaping as appetite for the other" (Ricoeur 1950: 91). To have needs does not mean being *determined* by them; we are continually *discerning* between needs and pre-reflectively evaluating when best to realize or suspend them. "It is because the impetus of need is *not* an automatic reflex that it can become a *motive* which inclines without compelling and that there are men who prefer to die of hunger than betray their friends" (Ricoeur 1950: 93). As Gandhi's hunger-strikes or the sacrifice of countless heroes and saints attest, "man is capable of choosing between his hunger *and* something else" (Ricoeur 1950: 93).

Need is thus revealed as a primordial spontaneity of the body where will mixes with a "first rank of values" which I have not engendered but which mobilize my feelings. The existing body as living flesh is the original source of carnal hermeneutics; it is what makes our first *savoir a savoir-faire*, a savvy of life.

Through need, values *emerge* without my having posited them in my act-generating role: bread is good, wine is good. Before I will it, a value already appeals to me solely because I

exist in flesh; it is already a reality in the world, a reality which reveals itself to me through the lack.... The first non-deductible is the body as existing, life as value. The mark of all existents, it is what first reveals values (Ricoeur 1950: 94).

It is at this crucial point that Ricoeur addresses the role of carnal imagination at the crossroads of need and willing. He explores how we imagine a missing person or thing (which we need or desire) and the ways towards reaching it. But the corporeal imagination is not just about projecting possibilities from within; it is equally a means of reading the “affective signs” of real sensible qualities out there in the world. The carnal imagination—witnessed in need, pleasure and desire—is already a diagnostics in which primal judgments become both affective and effective. Imagining the world in the flesh is a matter of feeling, valuing, and doing. “We must not lose sight of the *sense* quality of imagination,” insists Ricoeur, for it is only by our imagination mobilizing our desires and discerning between good and bad ways of realizing them that “our life can be *evaluated*” (Ricoeur 1950: 99). Values mean nothing unless they *touch* me. Pace Kant and the idealists, ethics requires the mediation of flesh. Ricoeur concludes his reading of the body as primal field of evaluation with this manifesto:

The body is not only a value among others, but is in some way involved in the apprehension of all motives and through them of all values. It is the affective *medium* of all value: a value can reach me only as dignifying a motive, and no motive can incline me if it does not *impress my sensibility*. I reach values through the vibration of an affect. To broaden out the spread of values means at the same time to deploy affectivity to its broadest span (Ricoeur 1950: 122).

Ricoeur spends the rest of his phenomenological analysis exploring this claim for affective sensibility as “medium” of evaluation. Suffice it for now to note that his initial sketch of corporal diagnostics offers what we might call a proto-hermeneutics of the flesh.

The Textual Turn

In spite of this promising early diagnostics of the body, however, Ricoeur was soon to abandon this trajectory. After the “textual turn” in the 1960s, we witness a surprising (and I believe regrettable) rift between a hermeneutics of texts, on one hand, and a phenomenology of affectivity, on the other. He now looks back on the whole emphasis on sensible experience as susceptible to the lure of “immediacy, effusiveness, intuitionism,” contrasting this with the more authentic “mediation of language” (Ricoeur 1995: 39). And he even commends the later Merleau-Ponty—in an obituary homage—for moving beyond his initial phenomenology of “incarnation” towards a “second philosophy” of language as privileged medium of “distance” and

“reflection” (Ricoeur 1999: 163–164).¹ A commendation which, one suspects, is curiously applicable to himself.

This tension between flesh and text is nowhere more evident than in the 1964 essay, “Wonder, Eroticism, Enigma.” Here Ricoeur speaks of sexuality as contrary to language. He starkly opposes what he calls (1) the “immediacy” of the “flesh to flesh” relationship and (2) the “mediations” of language and interpretation. Simply put: “Sexuality de-mediates language; it is eros not logos” (Ricoeur 1994: 141).

Eros in our contemporary culture, Ricoeur argues, has lost its old cosmic force in sacred mythology and assumed the form of a “restless desire.” It becomes a “demonism” that resists both the logos of understanding and the logic of instrumental rationality. “The enigma of sexuality,” he claims, “is that it remains irreducible to the trilogy which composes human existence: language, tool, institution” (Ricoeur 1994: 141). And if at times it articulates itself, it is “an infra, para-, super-linguistic expression.” Eros “mobilizes language,” admits Ricoeur, but only in so far as “it crosses it, jostles it, sublimates it, stupefies it, pulverizes it into a murmur.” Utterly de-mediates in this manner, eros cannot be reabsorbed either in an “ethic” (like marriage) or a “technique” (like pornography); it can only be “symbolically represented by means of whatever mythical elements remain” (Ricoeur 1994: 140). Left to itself, in short, the “flesh to flesh” relationship defies the order of logos: “Ultimately, when two beings embrace, they don’t know what they are doing, they don’t know what they want, they don’t know what they are looking for, they don’t know what they are finding. What is the *meaning* of this desire which drives them towards each other?” (Ricoeur 1994: 141). Sexual desire does not, claims Ricoeur, contain its own meaning but gives the impression that it participates in a network of powers whose cosmic connections are forgotten but not totally abandoned. Eros shows us that there is *more* to life than life—“that life is unique, universal, everything in everyone, and that sexual joy makes us participate in this mystery; that man does not become a person... unless he plunges again into the river of Life—such is the truth of sexuality” (Ricoeur 1994: 141). But this River of Life has, Ricoeur notes, become obscure and opaque for us today. Like a lost Atlantis sunk within us long ago, it has left sexuality as its “flotsam” (*épave*). Hence the enigma of eros. The meaning of this submerged, dislocated universe is no longer accessible to us in terms of immediate participation, but only indirectly “to the learned exegesis of ancient myths.” There is no straight route to eros—only hermeneutic detours.

So Ricoeur concludes that the best means to interpret the enigma of sexuality is a hermeneutics of ancient texts which record and represent this forgotten world of cosmic eros. The opposition between flesh and text could not be more explicit:

It lives again only thanks to hermeneutics—an art of interpreting writings which today are mute. And a new hiatus separates the flotsam of meaning which this *hermeneutics of*

¹One of the aims of our carnal hermeneutics project is to bring Merleau-Ponty’s radical phenomenology of flesh (working forwards to a diacritical hermeneutics with his notion of diacritical perception) with Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the text (working backwards to his early phenomenology of embodiment in light of his later hermeneutic reflections on flesh as a paradigm of “oneself as another”).

language restores to us and that other flotsam of meaning which sexuality discovers *without language*, organically (Ricoeur 1994: 141).

On the one hand, *textual reading*, on the other *organic feeling*. Two forms of flotsam at the limits of reason. A dualism of logos and eros.

* * *

But this was not to be Ricoeur's last word on the matter. Fortunately, he returns to other possibilities of a hermeneutics of flesh in one of his last major works, *Oneself as Another* (1990). In a section of the final chapter, entitled, "One's own body, or the Flesh," Ricoeur defines flesh as "the mediator between the self and a world which is taken in accordance with its various degrees of foreignness" (Ricoeur 1990: 318). As such, it reveals a certain "lived passivity" where the body, in the deepest intimacy of flesh, is exposed to otherness. How to "mediate" between this intimacy and this otherness, between the immanence of Husserl's *Leib* and the transcendence of Levinas's *Visage*, becomes a key concern.

This dialectic of passivity-otherness signals the enigma of one's own body. Or to put it in phenomenological terms: how can we fully experience the human body if it is not at once "a body among others" (*Körper*) and "my own" (*Leib*)? We need both, suggests Ricoeur. First, we need the experience of our own lived flesh to provide us with a sense of our individual *belonging*. This is what gives a corporeal constancy and anchoring to the self.² Flesh is the place where we *exist* in the world as both suffering and acting, pathos and praxis, resistance and effort. Combining the pioneering work of Maine de Biran with the phenomenologies of the *corps propre* in Husserl and Michel Henry, Ricoeur shows how it is through active "touch, in which our effort is extended, that external things attest to their existence as much as our own." It is the "same sense that gives the greatest certainty of one's own existence and the greatest certainty of external existence" (Ricoeur 1990: 322). In the pathos of passivity and passion, "one's own body is revealed to be the mediator between the intimacy of the self and the externality of the world" (Ricoeur 1990: 322).

Here Ricoeur makes the interesting point that it is not, as we might expect, in Heidegger—who ostensibly existentialised the phenomenological subject—that we

² See Ricoeur's cogent critique of Derek Parfit's "puzzling cases" of consciousness without bodies as well as of technological fictions of disincarnate human identities (Ricoeur 1990, 150–151). Ricoeur's main literary example is Robert Musil's *Man without Qualities*, but one could also add more recent sci-fi movies like *Simone* or *Her* where a virtual OS (computer operating system) is divorced from physical touch and taste, with dramatic existential consequences. Ricoeur's basic point is that if one deprives the human of its terrestrial-corporeal anchoring one deprives the self of any perduring lived identity as constancy-in-change (*idem-ipse*). Ricoeur argues that literary fictions, unlike technological fictions, remain imaginative variations on "an invariant, our corporeal condition experienced as the existential mediation between the self and the world" (Ibid., 150). This invariant anchoring of lived corporeality testifies to the ontological condition of carnal selfhood in "acting and suffering persons" (Ibid., 151).

discover the greatest ontology of the flesh.³ It is rather Husserl who offers the “most promising sketch of the flesh that would mark the inscription of hermeneutical phenomenology in an ontology of otherness” (Ricoeur 1990: 322). Ricoeur’s hermeneutic retrieval of Husserl runs as follows. In the *Cartesian Meditations*—written 10 years after *Ideas II*—the founder of phenomenology had argued that in order to constitute a “foreign” subjectivity, one must formulate the idea of “ownness”—namely, flesh in its difference with respect to the external body (of others seen by me or of me seen by others). Flesh opens up a realm of *Leibhaft* (immediate embodied givenness), excluding all objective properties. It is the pole of reference of all bodies belonging to this immanent nature of *ownness*. And it is by pairing one flesh with another that we derive the notion of an alter-ego. But here we return to the deeper paradox: flesh as a paradigm of *otherness*. Flesh is what is both most mine and most other. Closest to me and furthest from me at the same time. This enigma of far/near is revealed most concretely, once again, as *touch*. As center of pathos, our flesh’s “aptitude for feeling is revealed most characteristically in the sense of touch” (Ricoeur 1990: 324). It precedes and grounds both the “I can” and the “I want.” Indeed, it even precedes the very distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary. “I, as this man,” explains Ricoeur, “is the foremost otherness of the flesh with respect to all initiative” (Ricoeur 1990: 324). Or to put it in more technical language:

Flesh is the place of all the passive syntheses on which the active syntheses are constructed, the latter alone deserving to be called works (*Leistungen*); the flesh is the matter (*hule*) in resonance with all that can be said to be *hule* in every object perceived, apprehended. In short, it is the origin of all “alteration of ownness” (Ricoeur 1990: 324).⁴

³Ricoeur argues that Heidegger never developed a real ontology of flesh, though he possessed all the ingredients for such a project. His notion of *Befindlichkeit*—affective state of mind expressed in our moods—was particularly promising in this regard (Ricoeur 1990: 327 and note 34). It is telling that Heidegger acknowledged Aristotle’s interpretation of “affects” (*pathe*) as the “first systematic hermeneutic of the everydayness of Being with one another” (Heidegger 1962: 178); but he did not, alas, himself push this hermeneutic in the direction of an “ontology of flesh” open to the world of others. In spite of his investigation of Dasein as “thrownness,” he did not develop a hermeneutic reading of “the properly passive modalities of our desires and our moods as the sign, the symptom, the indication of the contingent character of our insertion in the world” (Ricoeur 1990: 327, note 34). In Heidegger a temporality of disincarnate Dasein (transcendental ontology) ultimately trumped a spatiality of incarnate flesh (carnal “ontics”). Ricoeur asks pointedly: Why “did Heidegger not grasp this opportunity to reinterpret the Husserlian notion of flesh (*Leib*), which he could not have been unaware of, in terms of the analytic of Dasein?” Ricoeur’s answer: “If the theme of embodiment appears to be stifled, if not repressed in *Being and Time*, this is doubtless because it must have appeared too dependent on the inauthentic forms of care—let us say, of preoccupation—that make us tend to interpret ourselves in terms of the objects of care. We must then wonder if it is not the unfolding of the problem of temporality, triumphant in the second section of *Being and Time*, that prevents an *authentic* phenomenology of spatiality—and along with it, an ontology of the flesh—from being given its chance to develop” (Ricoeur 1990: 328).

⁴See Didier Franck, *Chair et Corps: Sur la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1981), 109–111. Ricoeur relies heavily on Franck’s influential commentary for his reading of Husserl. He adds: “The kind of transgression of the sphere of ownness constituted by appresentation is valid only within the limits of a transfer of *sense*: the sense of ego is transferred to another

Ricoeur concludes accordingly that flesh is the support for selfhood's own "proper" otherness. For even if the otherness of the stranger could be derived from my sphere of ownness—as Husserl suggests—the otherness of the flesh would still precede it (Ricoeur 1990: 324). This paradox of flesh as ownness-otherness reaches dramatic proportions in a crucial passage from Husserl's "Fifth Meditation," where flesh is claimed to be a primordial space of immediacy prior to all linguistic or hermeneutic mediations:

Among the bodies [...] included in my peculiar ownness, I find my *animate organism* [*meinen Leib*], as *uniquely* singled out—namely as the only one of them that is not just a body but precisely an animate organism [flesh]: the sole Object within my world stratum to which, in accordance with experience, I ascribe *fields of sensation* (belonging to it, however, in different manners—a field of tactual sensations, a field of warmth and coldness, and so forth), the only Object "in which" I "*rule and govern*" *immediately*, governing particularly in each of its organs (Husserl 1931: 97).

It is only on the basis of this primordial spatial materiality of immanent flesh—as a "pre-linguistic" world of I can—that we are able to construct a genuine semantics and hermeneutics of action. But it is here that phenomenology reaches its limit, and Ricoeur departs from Husserl. In seeking to derive the objective world from the "non-objectivating primordial experience" of flesh, Husserl went too far. He ignored that flesh is not just mine but equally a body among other bodies—both *Leib* and *Körper* at once. In order to make flesh part of the world (*mondanéiser*) one needs to be not just oneself but oneself as another—a self with others. And this means that the otherness of others as "foreign" relates not only to the otherness of my flesh (that I am) but also exists prior to any reduction to ownness. For the flesh can only appear in the world as a body among bodies to the degree that I am myself already an other among others—a self-with-another "in the apprehension of a common nature, woven out of the network of intersubjectivity—itsself founding selfhood in its own way" (Ricoeur 1990: 326).

So Ricoeur concludes this highly intricate analysis by observing that while Husserl recognized the primordially of subjective flesh and the necessity of intersubjective language, he could not reconcile the two. "It is because Husserl thought of the other than me only as another me, and never of the self as another, that he has no answer to the paradox summed up in the question: how am I to understand that my flesh is also a body" (Ricoeur 1990: 326). In short, Husserl could not adequately account for both the flesh's intimacy to itself (in the absolute immediacy of immanence) and its opening onto the world (through the mediation of others). He had a carnal phenomenology but lacked a carnal hermeneutics. Only the latter could provide a full account of the ontological relationship between flesh and world.

* * *

body, which, as flesh, also contains the sense of ego. Whence the perfectly adequate expression of alter ego in the sense of a 'second flesh' ('*seconde chair propre*') (Ricoeur 1990: 334).

In correcting Husserl it is important, however, not to go to the other extreme. And this is, according to Ricoeur, where Levinas erred in traversing flesh too quickly towards alterity. Identifying the carnal caress with a play of feminine immanence, Levinas redirected the virile self in the direction of an ethics of vertical transcendence in which the Face trumps Flesh. In contrast to both Husserl and Levinas, we might say (with Ricoeur and Irigaray) that if flesh needs the other to save it from fragmentation and inner collapse, the Other needs flesh to save it from Platonic moralism and paternalism.⁵ And here we return, finally, to the realization that we need to combine sensibility (flesh) and language (face) in a new carnal hermeneutics. The ultimate question stands: how to make sense of sense by making flesh a body in the world.

Let us recap. In order for my flesh to engage upon an intersubjective world with others and empathize with them, I must have both an intimate body for me (*Leib*) and a physical natural body among other bodies (*Körper*). This involves a complex intertwining (*Verflechtung/entrelacs*) whereby I experience myself as someone in a shared world. Thus Ricoeur, challenging the Sartrean dichotomy of flesh versus body, asks: “To say that my flesh is also a body, does this not imply that it appears in just this way to the eyes of others? Only a flesh (for me) that is a body (for others) can play the role of first *analogon* in the analogical transfer from flesh to flesh” (Ricoeur 1990: 333). And this reveals in turn that intentionalities that are aimed at the other—as strange and foreign to me—go beyond the sphere of my immanent ownness in which they are rooted and given. The other is revealed to my flesh as *both* inscribed in my embodied relation through flesh *and* as always already transcendent. Or to put it in more technical terms, the other is not reducible to the “immediate givenness of the flesh to itself” in originary presentation, but only in appresentation. The gap can thus never be bridged between “the presentation of my experience and the appresentation of your experience” (Ricoeur 1990: 333). An interval revealed in the fact that the pairing of your body over *there* as flesh with my body *here* as flesh always retains a certain distance. The analogizing grasp between two embodied selves is never complete or adequate. Total assimilation is impossible. “Never will pairing allow us to cross the barrier that separates appresentation from intuition (immediate presentation). The notion of appresentation, therefore, combines similarity and dissymmetry in a unique manner” (Ricoeur 1990: 334). It is this double fidelity of flesh to both near and far that is captured in Ricoeur’s felicitous formula, “oneself as another.” And it is precisely because of the irreducible distance of alterity at the very heart of our flesh that hermeneutic mediation is always operative. This is where phenomenology reaches its limit and calls for more. Where the analogical transfer of flesh to flesh, through an intersubjectivity of bodies,

⁵In addition to Ricoeur’s critical reading of Levinas in this regard, we should note again here Luce Irigaray’s pioneering feminist-psychoanalytic critique of Levinas’s phallogocentric metaphysics as well as the new feminist hermeneutics of the semiotic lived body in such thinkers as Julia Kristeva, Anne O’Byrne, Shelley Rambo, and Karmen McKendrick. Kristeva’s new feminism of the body is linked to her project for a new humanism informed, in part, by a retrieval of the deep unconscious resources of the “sensible imaginary” in writers like Colette, Marguerite Duras, and Teresa of Avila.

“transgresses the program of phenomenology in transgressing the experience of one’s own flesh” (Ricoeur 1990: 335).

So what does all this mean for the hermeneutic relationships between self and other? It means, first, that the other who is stranger is *also* my “*semblable*,” a counterpart who, like me, can say “I.” The transfer of sense shows how “she thinks” signifies “she says in her heart: I think”; and at the same time it reveals the inverse movement of “she thinks and feels in a way that I can never think or feel” (Ricoeur 1990: 355). I am called by the other who comes to me in a way that I cannot assimilate to my immanence. I can only respond by “reading” their transcendence in immanence, across distance and difference. Ricoeur actually speaks of a hermeneutic interpreting of the body by the body which precedes the work of inference through formal linguistic signs. He refers to it as a primal “relation of *indication* in which the interpretation is made immediately, much as the reading of symptoms.” And the “style” of confirmation to which this reading of indications belongs involves, says Ricoeur, “neither primordial intuition nor discursive inference” (Ricoeur 1990: 336). It entails a special grammar of carnal hermeneutics across distance, gaps and differences. Carnal hermeneutics as diacritical hermeneutics.⁶

With this final intuition, Ricoeur retrieves some of his most radical early insights into a diagnostics of affectivity. He charts a middle way between Husserl’s phenomenology of carnal immanence and Levinas’s ethics of radical transcendence. While the former addressed the movement of sense from me to the other (through analogy, transfer, pairing, appresentation), the latter addressed the movement of the other towards me. But in Levinas, as we saw, the other goes too far in instigating a rupture of separation: the face of the Other is one of radical exteriority to the exclusion of all mediation. “The Other absolves itself from relation in the same movement by which the Infinite draws free from Totality” (Ricoeur 1990: 366). So if Husserlian phenomenology veers at times towards an excess of egology (the haptic circle of the hand touching its hand, critiqued by Derrida in *On Touching*), Levinas veers toward the opposite extreme of heterology. The ultimate “evincing” of the Levinasian face, as Ricoeur notes, lies apart from “the vision of forms and even the sensuous hearing of voices” (Ricoeur 1990: 337). To the extent that a call remains, it is the voice of the Master of justice who teaches but does not touch. For Levinas there is no primacy of *relation* between the terms of flesh and face. No communication or communion possible. No *metaxu*. “No middle ground, no between, is secured to lessen the utter dissymmetry between the Same and the Other” (Ricoeur 1990: 338). Put in more affective terms, the Levinasian Other persecutes, summons, obsesses, offends, but does not love. And it is against this paroxysm of absolute separation that a

⁶ See the current development of diacritical hermeneutics and diagnostics by Emmanuel Alloa, Ted Toadvine, and Brian Treanor as well as certain of our own recent publications, Richard Kearney, “What is Diacritical Hermeneutics?,” cited above; “Eros, Diacritical Hermeneutics and the Maybe,” *Philosophical Thresholds: Crossings of Life and World, Selected Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*, vol 36, Special SPEP supplement, *Philosophy Today*, vol 55, ed. Cynthia Willett and Leonard Lawlor, 2001; and “Diacritical Hermeneutics” in *Hermeneutic Rationality/La rationalité herméneutique*, ed. Andrzej Wierciński et al. (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2011).

diacritical hermeneutics of dialogue proposes itself. “To mediate the opening of the Same onto the Other and the internalization of the voice of the other in the Same, must not language contribute its resources of communication, hence of reciprocity as is attested by the exchange of personal pronouns (I, you, he, she, us)?” (Ricoeur 1990: 339). And must not this basic linguistic mediation call in turn for an even more radical hermeneutic exchange—“that of question and answer in which the roles are continually reversed?” In short, surmises Ricoeur, “is it not necessary that a dialogue superpose a relation on the supposedly absolute distance between the separate I and the teaching Other?” (Ricoeur 1990: 399). And is it not precisely the task of carnal hermeneutics to find the just balance between the movement of same toward other and the other toward same? A balance which would not only bridge the divide between Husserl and Levinas, but also, by extension, between Merleau-Ponty’s reversible *chair* and Derrida’s irreversible *différance*?

The answer, we submit, is yes and raises further on-going interrogations. For what kind of language are we talking about? One not only of words and writing, but also of sensing and touching. And what kind of dialogue? One not just between speakers but also between bodies. And what kind of sense and sensibility is at issue here? One not only of intellectual “understanding” but also of tangible “orientation.” Thus does the simplest phenomenon of touch lead to the most complex of philosophies. Because the simplest *is* the most complex and remains the most enigmatic. In posing such questions, Ricoeur opens a door where phenomenology and hermeneutics may cross in the swing-door of the flesh. He marks a new beginning. But the real work remains to be done.

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Part II
Hermeneutic Phenomenology of the Self

Identity and Selfhood: Paul Ricœur's Contribution and Its Continuations

Claude Romano

Abstract The main contribution of Ricœur's work *Oneself as Another* to current debates on personal identity and the self is the elaboration of a new concept of selfhood that includes some features of Heidegger's *Selbstheit*, but is utterly different from the classic starting point of egologies from Descartes onward, namely, the "I" or the "Self". In the Heideggerian sense, selfhood is no longer a kind of entity, distinct from the human being or the embodied individual, or a name for the very continuity of consciousness, as it happens in Locke, but a mode of being (*Weise zu sein*) of *Dasein*. But in contrast with Heidegger, selfhood is also, according to Ricœur, a type of identity, since the whole conceptuality of *Oneself as Another* rests on a distinction between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity – only the latter being synonymous with selfhood. This article seeks to understand and to challenge the connection drawn by Ricœur between the problem of selfhood and the problem of identity to oneself, suggesting that the former notion cannot really be understood as a sort of identity.

Keywords Identity • Selfhood • Self • Attestation • Responsibility

I would like to present and discuss the Ricœurian concept of "selfhood" (*ipséité*) as it is developed in *Oneself as Another* – a work that constitutes the crowning achievement and recapitulation of his whole philosophical itinerary. Ricœur himself presented his work as situated at the confluence of three main sources: 1) French-language reflexive philosophy, illustrated by the names of Maine de Biran, Ravaisson, Lachelier and especially Nabert; 2) Husserl's transcendental phenomenology; 3) philosophical hermeneutics, which at least in its Heideggerian and Gadamerian¹

¹"I would like to characterize the philosophical tradition from which I draw by three traits: it is in the line of a *reflexive* philosophy; it remains within the movement of Husserlian *phenomenology*; it seeks to be a *hermeneutic* variant of that phenomenology," (translated from the original French) (Ricœur 1998: 29). Jean Grondin has shown quite aptly that in reality it will not do to understand the appearance itself of the concept of hermeneutics in Ricœur, in the second volume of *Philosophy*

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versions includes the ambition of breaking with certain guiding theses of the first two traditions, notably that of a radical self-foundation of the subject in the infallible transparency of consciousness to itself.

Although Ricœur carries out a form of *Auseinandersetzung* with the Cartesian tradition and the transcendental theories of subjectivity in *Oneself as Another*, he nonetheless continues, in this eminently stratified text, to engage in crossovers and set up transitions between his own theses and the conceptions born out of the “philosophies of the *Cogito*”. The question I would like to formulate is whether the primary innovation of the book, the concept of *selfhood* itself, is weakened by this argumentative strategy.

This strategy of recovering central aspects of the philosophies of consciousness and the post-Cartesian egologies, within a “hermeneutic of the self”, is illustrated first by Ricœur’s attitude toward the *cogito* itself. In renewing a theme that was already announced, 40 years earlier, at the beginning of the *Voluntary and the Involuntary*, that of a “internally fractured” *cogito* (Ricœur 1950: 17), Ricœur claims that his hermeneutic of the self will seek a middle ground between the destitution of the *cogito* in the style of Nietzsche-inspired post-modern thought and an apology for the subject in the style of the philosophies of consciousness. The quarrel of the *cogito*, he affirms, is “superseded” [*dépassée*]. (Ricœur 1992: 4) Indeed, it is less the *cogito* itself than its alleged immediacy and its character as an ultimate foundation that must be questioned and assumed to be problematic. The hermeneutic of the self proposes to replace the “I”, defined by its absolute self-positing, or ultimate founding, and its closure on itself excluding any form of otherness, by a “self” (*soi*) possessing very different characteristics: “To say self,” writes Ricœur, “is not to say *I*. The *I* poses itself—or is deposed. The *self* is implied reflexively in operations whose analysis precedes the return towards oneself” (Ricœur 1992: 18 trans. modified).² The “I” is, by necessity, inalienable—or it *is* not. It excludes all *alius* and forms a circle with itself; it is only given to itself in the first-person. The “self” has a different status if we begin by taking seriously its grammatical characteristics. A “reflexive pronoun belonging to all grammatical persons” (Ricœur 1992: 2), the “self” is not specifically tied to the first-person singular, and this status makes it apt to mark the reflexive character of the self-relation *in general*. Ricœur’s project is thus to establish a just relationship with the subject, at equal distance from the “exalted subject” of the post-Cartesians and the “humiliated subject” of the post-Nietzscheans.

The central concept of this hermeneutics of the self is obviously that of *selfhood*, which Ricœur opposes to that of *identity* from the book’s preface onward. In a

of the Will, as an act of allegiance to the Heideggerian hermeneutic or its Gadamerian continuations (*Truth and Method* was published the same year), but rather as a solution to an original problem: that of integrating into philosophical discourse a reflection on the Christian symbolism of evil and consequently the problem of “the rules of deciphering applied to a world of symbols,” (Ricœur, 1960: 12) (translated from the original French). See the conclusion of *Le Volontaire et l’involontaire*, « Le symbole donne à penser » and J. Grondin (2013), chapter 3.

²On this distinction, see also Ricœur 1985: 356; trans Ricœur 1988: 247.

passage that is worth citing in its entirety, for it contains both Ricœur's whole project and several of its central difficulties, the aim of the book is presented as being:

[to] distinguish two major meanings of "identity" [...] depending on whether one understands by "identical" the equivalent of the Latin *ipse* or *idem*. The equivocity of the term "identical" will be at the center of our reflections on personal identity and narrative identity and related to a primary trait of the self, namely its temporality. Identity in the sense of *idem* unfolds an entire hierarchy of significations [...] *permanence in time* constitutes the highest order [of this hierarchy], to which will be opposed that which differs, in the sense of changing or variable. Our thesis throughout will be that identity in the sense of *ipse* implies no assertion concerning some unchanging core of the personality. And this will be true, even when selfhood adds its own peculiar modalities of identity, as will be seen in the analysis of promising. (Ricœur 1992: 2)

Two senses of identity are contrasted here: one that corresponds to *idem* in Latin, that is, to "sameness" (*mêmeté*) in general, as Ricœur calls it; and one that corresponds to *ipse* in Latin, which we can translate as "in person". Here an initial difficulty appears: *ipse* can hardly be translated by "same" (*même*) on its own, but must rather be rendered by "himself" (*lui-même*), or "herself" (*elle-même*). It is not certain that we are dealing with a term that marks identity in a strict sense, or, in any case, the identity relation ("the same as...") as *idem* does. If we consider only the first examples mentioned by the Latin-French dictionary Gaffiot, it becomes clear that none of them introduces, strictly speaking, the idea of the *identity relation* between a thing and itself; *ipse Caesar*: Caesar himself (as opposed to an emissary or representative of Caesar); *ipsum latine loqui*: the very fact of speaking Latin; *ille ipse factus sum*: I have become him in person, I have gotten into the skin of the character. I stress the fact that, in all of these usages, *ipse* is only employed as an expression of emphasis by which one indicates that it is the person *herself*, or the *very person* who is in question. Ernout and Thomas define *ipse* as "an intensive word employed with an idea of latent opposition" and meaning: "him by contrast with another considered explicitly or not" (Ernout and Thomas 2002: 189). Is selfhood then a form of identity? Is the concept of identity "equivocal"? I will return to these questions further on. Second remark: according to Ricœur, identity in the sense of *idem* stands opposed to mutability or variability through time. *Idem*-identity refers to "a non-changing core of the personality"; from which it follows, in Ricœur's view, that identity implies immutability. As for selfhood, it is not incompatible with change; and this is why it brings "its own modalities of identity". Hence a second problem: Does identity, even in the sense of *idem*, really imply the idea of immutability in such a way that a second form of identity is called for, *ipse*-identity, in order to reconcile self-identity and change?

It is too early to attempt to answer these questions, but it is already clear that the opposition itself between identity and selfhood rests on two strong theses, one according to which "identity" through time means "immutability" and the other according to which selfhood is a form of identity. On the basis of these two assertions, *Oneself as Another* goes on to oppose the idea of *temporal permanence* which underlies the theories of identity to that of maintaining oneself or "self-constancy" (*maintien de soi*) which takes the form of a commitment towards others, and which

is the prerogative of selfhood: despite the changes I undergo, despite the Proustian “intermittences of the heart”, I keep my word, I stand firmly by my commitments.

We have here, probably, the main idea underlying Ricœur’s whole construction, in support of which he references a passage in *Being and Having* in which Gabriel Marcel formulates the following alternative: all commitment supposes either that I fail others, if I follow my own inclinations, or that I fail myself, that is to say, I act, at a given moment, against my inclinations—but of course it is to the other *first of all* that I must be loyal, if the very idea of commitment has a meaning (Ricœur 1992: 17). This alternative commands the fundamental opposition between sameness and selfhood. Selfhood consists in a kind of self-maintaining (*maintien de soi-même*) despite all the empirical changes that affect one’s “character”, a “constancy” that does not rest on the persistence of an identity. Selfhood is not a substance-like type of permanence, but a “mode of being” (Ricœur 1992: 309) which is to be understood on the model of a promise. All promises rest on the commitment to keep them. Selfhood concerns then, not the identity of an immutable substrate, but the way I commit myself and take up a position with respect to my own commitments—the way I commit myself to fulfill them. This is why selfhood does not belong to truth in a theoretical sense, but to truth understood in an *existential* sense, to the confidence of which we render ourselves worthy, to *trustworthiness*. In fact, it belongs to what Ricœur calls “attestation” and which is, he writes, the “password for this entire book” (Ricœur 1992: 289 note 82). Attestation is defined as a form of certainty: not the doxastic certainty of belief, but the type of certainty that we concede to a witness, and that renders his testimony believable and acceptable; for the witness is someone (in) whom we believe (Ricœur 1992: 21). Therefore, attestation is the fact of committing oneself to keep one’s own commitments and thus to render oneself trustworthy for others. It defines selfhood insofar as the latter consists in—we might say—a second-order commitment, a commitment to keep my own commitments, on the model of the one I take on when I give my word.³ “[A]ttestation is the assurance—the credence and the trust—of *existing* in the mode of selfhood.” (Ricœur 1992: 302) That is why, selfhood is, first of all, a fundamental attitude that I adopt *towards others*, a form of responsibility that I assume with respect to another; it depends in its very essence on an ethical solicitation: ““From you,” says the other, “I expect that you will keep your word”; to you, I reply: “You can count on me”” (Ricœur 1992: 268). As a commitment to keep my commitments, as a claim of reliability, it is not only intrinsically linked to others, in front of whom alone I can be myself, but also tied to an ethical requirement. There is, says Ricœur, “a moral dimension to selfhood” (Ricœur 1992: 281), for the concept of selfhood only makes sense in the context of the ethical relationship between a person who claims to be trustworthy and another who takes him or her to be so. This ethical background strongly relates Ricœur’s conception with Charles Taylor’s, for whom, as well, the

³This idea of second degree commitment is not literally Ricœurian, but it seems to me implicitly contained in a passage from the 1985 conference “Individual and Personal Identity” where Ricœur writes: “The obligation to keep one’s promise is, in a certain sense, the promise of promise,” (Ricœur 2013: 352, translated from the original French).

self resides in a manifold of commitments insofar as they define my fundamental orientation in a moral space, and it distances him (Ricœur) from a conception of selfhood like that of Heidegger, who claims, by contrast, a complete axiological neutrality for his analysis. This characterization of selfhood allows a better understanding of the two “dialectics” that are at work in *Oneself as Another*, the second of which gives the book its title: the dialectic of *idem* and *ipse* (Ricœur 1992: 16), and “the dialectic [...] of selfhood and otherness” (Ricœur 1992: 16).⁴

I will set aside the dialectic of *idem* and *ipse* as it is brought to light in the analysis of narrative identity, and focus directly on the dialectic of selfhood and otherness.

This dialectic constitutes, to an even greater degree, the tropism toward which the whole book is magnetized. As the model of promising already foreshadows—because there is no promise except *for the other*—selfhood cannot be captured in a monological model, much less a solipsistic one. Ricœur's whole effort seeks to establish, especially in studies V and VI, that “otherness is not added on to selfhood from outside, as though to prevent its solipsistic drift, but [...] belongs instead to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological constitution of selfhood” (Ricœur 1992: 317). It is worth noting once again the continuity of Ricœur's position in relation with his earlier work. Indeed, the claim that the self is structured by an intimate otherness can be already found in the *Voluntary and Involuntary*: “I treat myself as a thou” (Ricœur 1950: 14). Now, this intimate otherness will take on three successive forms: first, that of one's own body, and more particularly the suffering body (Ricœur 1992: 319 *ff*); second, that of others, insofar as they call me to responsibility, in the words of Levinas (Ricœur 1992: 329 *ff*); and finally, that of my own conscience, which is no longer thought of as a call that Dasein addresses to itself from the radical solitude of anxiety, and therefore as an attestation or testimony (*Bezeugung*) of Dasein's own authenticity to itself, as was the case in *Sein und Zeit*, but rather as an injunction coming from the Other, addressed in the second person, and before which I am in a position of absolute passivity. Unlike Heidegger's, this call is not indeterminate and empty, “it enjoins [one] to *live well with and for others in just institutions and to esteem oneself as the bearer of this vow [vœu]*” (Ricœur 1992: 352 trans. modified). We have reached the point where selfhood, understood as attestation, and being-for-others prove inseparable, where selfhood itself is conceived of as a form of passivity *vis-à-vis* others, insofar as this passivity finds its expression in the “intimate” otherness to self of one's conscience.

It would be superfluous to dwell on the critical potential of this approach to selfhood compared to the one developed in *Sein und Zeit*. Despite some fundamental points of agreement, such as the idea that selfhood is not to be conceived in terms of the permanence of a substance or a subject, but in terms of a “way of being” (*Weise zu sein*) or a “way of existing” (*Weise zu existieren*), or even the idea according to which selfhood unfolds a mode of “self-constancy” or “constancy of the self” (*Selbst-ständigkeit, Ständigkeit des Selbst*), which is not the permanence (*Beharrlichkeit*) of an unchanging substrate, Ricœur demarcates himself sharply

⁴ See also Ricœur 1992: 3: “the dialectic of *self* and the *other than self*.”

from Heidegger in rejecting both the exorbitant primacy the latter confers, in a neo-Stoic vein,⁵ to the phenomenon of death in his approach to selfhood in terms of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*), and the overly “monological” character of Heideggerian selfhood, insofar as it is based both on a call of conscience that Dasein addresses to itself and on the testimony (*Bezeugung*) that Dasein bears *vis-à-vis* itself and by which it testifies to itself silently its own authenticity. More generally, Ricœur’s analysis entirely removes the concept of selfhood from the horizon of a philosophy of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) in its polar opposition to a philosophy of “the They” (*das Man*), which forms its essential counterpart. It discards any emphasis on anxiety and its radical solitude (*esseulement*), and, as a consequence, it refuses to conceive of the phenomenon of being-together as linked to an inevitable decline.

Is Selfhood a Form of Identity?

I have tried so far to present the outlines of Ricœur’s conception of selfhood as faithfully as possible. The time has come for me to formulate a number of questions. They will all revolve around the link between selfhood and identity, and through this problem, they will investigate the relationship that this hermeneutics of the self bears to certain philosophies that take place in the wake of Descartes.

It may be argued that the whole project of *Oneself as Another* is contained *in nuce* in a sentence of *Sein und Zeit*. Indeed, Heidegger writes in §27: « *Die Selbigkeit des eigentlich existierenden Selbst ist aber dann ontologisch durch eine Kluft getrennt von der Identität des in der Erlebnismannigfaltigkeit sich durchhaltenden Ich.* » (Heidegger 1986: 130). According to Stambaugh’s translation: “But, then, the sameness of the authentically existing self is separated ontologically by a gap from the identity of the I maintaining itself in the multiplicity of its ‘experiences’” (Heidegger 1996: 122). This sentence is singular and even unique in Heidegger’s *Hauptwerk* for a simple reason: this is the only appearance in the entire book of the idea of a “sameness (*Selbigkeit*)” that Heidegger attributes to the self (*Selbst*) as such, “sameness” that is of an entirely different kind than the identity (*Identität*) of the “I”. If this sentence is a unique occurrence, this is not only because “*Selbigkeit*” intervenes a mere five times throughout the book (and the other times with a meaning that has nothing to do with the issue of *Selbtheit*),⁶ but, more fundamentally,

⁵See Ricœur 1992: 123: “it is not certain that ‘anticipatory resoluteness’ in the face of death exhausts the sense of self-constancy [*maintien de soi*] [...] Other attitudes [...] reveal just as much about the fundamental conjunction between the problematic of permanence in time and that of the self, inasmuch as the self does not coincide with the same”. Thus, to theorize self-constancy, it is not necessary to assign it to Heideggerian resoluteness. On the contrary, to conceive of such a constancy, insists Ricœur, “The properly ethical justification of the promise suffices of itself,” and is expressed in the phrase “I will hold firm”.

⁶Cf. Heidegger 1986: p. 188, 218, 320, 435. In these passages, the term *Selbigkeit* refers not to the mode of being of *Selbtheit*, but rather to the mode of permanence of a being *Vorhanden*. This point is well illustrated by the following passage on page 320: “Denn der ontologische Begriff des

because Heidegger does not say anywhere else that a form of sameness or identity belongs to selfhood. And the reason for this is relatively simple: in Heidegger's view, as he continually emphasizes, selfhood consists in a *way of being* of Dasein. As a way of being contrasting with decline (*Verfallen*), selfhood is an *attitude* that Dasein takes towards itself and others; it is not a form of self-identity. Of course, selfhood is based on a deeper ontological structure, *Jemeinigkeit*, mineness, of which it is a "modification": its *authentic* modification, as opposed to its inauthentic modification, being lost in the "the They", fallenness or decline.⁷ When I exist according to the mode of being of selfhood, I decide my being "in person (*ipse*)," instead of relying on the They to decide for me. Resoluteness is a "choice of choosing" against the absence of choice and fundamental indecision of the They. Consequently, expressing himself as he does here, Heidegger does not seem far from losing sight of the originality of his own conception, which seeks to render, by the term of *Selbstheit*, not what would make us in any sense *identical* to ourselves, but an *attitude* we can adopt or not (and that we often end up abdicating) with respect to our existence itself. This attitude does display a form of "constancy", but it is not itself a constancy, much less a kind of identity.

This leads me directly to the first of Ricœur's assertions that I would like to consider. Can selfhood be conceived of as a sort of identity? This question itself has a corollary: is there an "equivocity of identity" (Ricœur 1992: 2) or an "equivocity of the term 'same'" (Ricœur 1992: 2), as Ricœur asserts?

The location of the difficulty is clear enough: if selfhood is "a way of being",⁸ as Heidegger already emphasized in *Sein und Zeit* by characterizing *Selbstheit* as a *Weise zu sein* or as a *weise zu existieren*, and if selfhood is, as Ricœur characterizes it, the way of being in which I am committed to keeping my commitments toward others, in which I vouch for them despite my own transformations, and purport to be trustworthy, reliable, in an act of attestation – how could this "way of being" designate at the same time a form of identity? Standing by one's own commitments

Subjekts charakterisiert *nicht die Selbstheit des Ich qua Selbst, sondern die Selbigkeit und Beständigkeit eines immer schon Vorhandenen.*" According to Stambaugh's translation: "Nevertheless, he [Kant] conceives this I again as subject, thus in an ontologically inappropriate sense. For the ontological concept of the subject does *not* characterize the *selfhood of the I qua self, but the sameness and constancy of something always already objectively present.*" (Heidegger 1996: 295, my emphasis). In other texts, however, and especially in the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* Heidegger does contrast two types of identity: "The Dasein is not only, like every being in general, identical with itself in a formal-ontological sense—everything is identical with itself—and it is also not merely, in distinction from a natural thing, conscious of this self-sameness. Instead, the Dasein has a peculiar selfsameness with itself in the sense of selfhood. It is in such a way that it is in a certain way *its own*, it *has itself*, and only on that account can it *lose itself*." (Heidegger 1975: 242; Heidegger 1982: 170). It is as if Ricœur based his theory more on the 1927 lectures than on *Being and Time*.

⁷"I *myself* am not for the most part the who of Da-sein, but the they-self is. Authentic being-a-self shows itself to be an existentiell modification (*Modifikation*) of the they which is to be defined existentially." (Heidegger 1996: 247, §54).

⁸"My working hypothesis [is] that the distinction between selfhood and sameness does not simply concern two constellations of meaning but involves two modes of being" (Ricœur 1992: 209).

is certainly not “a form of identity” – at most, it could be *an aspect* of someone’s identity. To a person’s identity can belong the fact that he stands by his own commitments and keeps his word, but keeping one’s word or adopting a particular attitude is certainly not, in itself, a form of identity, regardless of the concept of “identity” in question.

We can restate the same problem in another way, starting from the definitions that Ricœur gives of sameness and selfhood. Indeed, if selfhood is a form of identity, it remains to be understood *which form*. And in vain would one search for a solution to this problem anywhere in the book. What form of identity, exactly, is selfhood meant to name? What are the two meanings of “identical” or “same” underlying, respectively, *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity? Ricœur’s silence on this issue is perhaps not the result of a mere lack of attention. Indeed, in the fifth study on the problem of personal identity, Ricœur does consider two senses of identity, which he, following the logicians, calls numerical identity and qualitative identity, respectively. Yet he proceeds to assign *them both* to *idem*-identity or sameness:

Sameness is a concept of relation and a relation of relations. First comes *numerical* identity: thus, we say of two occurrences of a thing, designated by an invariable noun in ordinary language, that they do not form two different things but “one and the same” thing. Here, identity denotes oneness: the opposite is plurality (not one but two or several). To this first component of the notion of identity corresponds the notion of identification [...] In second place we find *qualitative* identity, in other words, extreme resemblance. (Ricœur 1992: 116 trans. modified)

As this passage shows, both meanings of “identity” that correspond to numerical and qualitative identity are “components” of *idem*-identity or sameness. This is confirmed by several other passages. For example, the identity of character, says Ricœur, is close to *idem*-identity, to sameness, insofar as “character assures at once numerical identity, qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity in change and, finally, the permanence in time which *define sameness*” (Ricœur 1992: 122 my emphasis). But then, as long as “selfhood [...] is not sameness,” (Ricœur 1992: 116) and is even “irreducible”⁹ to sameness, it must be concluded that neither numerical identity, nor qualitative identity correspond to *ipse*-identity. The question becomes even more pressing: to what meaning of identity does *ipse*-identity correspond? If it is neither to the meaning of numerical identity, nor to that of qualitative identity, what is the remaining third sense of the term? And here, the suspicion that there is no answer to this question, not for contingent reasons, but for necessary ones, gains in plausibility. After all, *there is no other concept of identity, logically speaking, apart from the two concepts mentioned above*. It must then be concluded that selfhood—if this concept is to make sense—is simply not a kind of identity.

But first let us consider the reasons that may have motivated Ricœur’s assertion. It seems to me that they are at least two in number.

⁹There is “irreducibility of the two problematics one to the other,” (that of *ipse* and that of *idem*) (Ricœur 1992 118), or, along the same lines, “irreducibility of selfhood to sameness,” (Ricœur 1992: 128).

The first is the strategic role that the concept of selfhood plays in the economy of his thought. Ricœur's purpose is, indeed, to *criticize* the conceptions of personal identity that rely only on *idem*-identity and to do so in the name of a *more adequate* conception of this identity. But suppose that selfhood does not respond to the same kind of question as *idem*-identity allegedly does. The question of selfhood would be: "In what way (or according to what mode of being) does someone who vouches for himself, who "is herself" in the sense of *attestation*, exist?" Accordingly, this question would simply be *quite distinct* from the traditional question of personal identity ("Who am I?") and selfhood could even less provide a tool for the critique of classical theories of personal identity since it belongs to a *completely different* issue. In sum, if selfhood is a mode of being, it has *nothing to do* with the problem of self-identity, and there is no reason to *oppose idem*-identity and selfhood, as two more or less adequate solutions to the *same* problem.

The second part of my response concerns the continuity that Ricœur intends nevertheless to maintain between his own conception and the traditional conceptions of the "I" (*moi*) or "self" (*soi*). Indeed, Ricœur, is not the first—far from it—to take issue with the substantive conceptions of self-identity, that is, those which rely on the idea of an immutable core or substrate; Locke is the first, within the framework of his theory of the *Self*, to have rejected the Cartesian solution to the problem of personal identity in terms of substantial unity, using a famous phrase: "*personal Identity* consists, not in the Identity of Substance, but [...] in the Identity of *consciousness*" (Locke 1975 342). What ensures our identity is absolutely not the fact of being the same substrate, but only the consciousness we have of ourselves as being one and the same person, one and the same *Self* and, hence, the continuity of our memory. In the perspective of *Oneself as Another*, one might expect Ricœur to dismiss Locke's view as a mere variant of the theories of *idem*-identity. However, in a crucial comment, Ricœur implies that Locke may have anticipated the concept of selfhood (*ipséité*) in the sense that Ricœur himself uses it: when Locke rejected substantiality and adopted psychological continuity as the criterion for self-identity "the turn to reflection and memory did, in fact, mark a conceptual reversal in which selfhood was silently substituted for sameness" (Ricœur 1992: 126) By this remark, Ricœur emphasizes a form of continuity between his own approach and that of the "theories of the *cogito*."

Nevertheless, Locke's solution comes up against some serious challenges, notably the well-known following problem: the argument that self-identity consists in the consciousness of oneself as being one and the same through memory hits a stumbling block in the fact that being identical to oneself is one thing, and awareness of being identical to oneself is another: it is perfectly possible to be identical to someone without being aware of it (*e.g.*, because of amnesia), and one can also be aware of being identical to someone without actually being identical to that person (because one believes oneself *mistakenly* to be that person). Self-identity and consciousness of oneself as one and the same over time are quite simply two different things. Far from it being consciousness of identity that founds identity (or "*is*" identity), it is rather identity that founds consciousness of identity: only someone who is actually identical to himself may also have an awareness of himself as a

single person. Otherwise, if it sufficed to be conscious of oneself as one and the same to *be* one and the same, it would suffice that I believe myself to have memories in common with Napoleon in order to be *ipso facto* Napoleon, for it would suffice that I believe myself to be identical to someone to actually be that person.

Now, the problem is, this stumbling block for Locke's theory reappears, *mutatis mutandis*, in Ricœur's own conception. Selfhood consists in an assumption of responsibility by which we ask of others that they take us to be the same as the one who took on certain commitments in the past: "Holding oneself responsible now," writes Ricœur, "is, in a manner that remains to be specified, accepting to be held to be the same today as the one who acted yesterday and who will act tomorrow" (Ricœur 1992: 295). Thus, even if the subject of the promise has changed, "self-constancy, a synonym for *ipse*-identity, is assumed by a moral subject who asks [*demande*] to be considered the same as the other that he or she appears to have become" (Ricœur 1992: 295 trans. modified). But in the same way that *considering* oneself to be the same does not amount to *being* the same, asking to be *held* as identical is hardly the same thing as being identical. If selfhood were a form of identity, then to ask to be held as identical to someone would be the same thing as being identical with that person! Moreover, asking to be held as identical to *X* makes sense only for someone who actually *is* identical to *X*. A criminal cannot ask to be taken as identical to the person who committed a crime unless he indeed *is* the perpetrator of the crime in question—otherwise, his request would have something crazy about it, and far from being a form of responsibility, it should rather give rise to a verdict of irresponsibility.

The conclusion is simple: selfhood is not a form of identity, and if "same" has several meanings, there is no meaning of *ipse*-identity that could stand alongside other meanings such as numerical and qualitative identity. Actually, the contrast drawn by Ricœur is based on a second deeper assumption, which underlies all his analyses.

What does Ricœur, in fact, mean by "identity"? The time has come to raise this question. And the answer is hardly in doubt: for Ricœur, self-identity necessarily means a sort of immutability. "Identity in the sense of *idem* unfolds an entire hierarchy of significations [...] of which permanence in time constitutes the highest order, to which will be opposed that which differs, in the sense of changing or variable" (Ricœur 1992: 2 trans. modified). The *opposite* of "identical" is "different" in the sense of *variable*; it follows that identical must be held as synonymous with invariable or immutable. This is confirmed by the 1986 conference "Narrative Identity": "identical means extremely similar [...] and consequently immutable, unchanging through time".¹⁰ It is only because Ricœur understands *idem*-identity in this way that he can oppose to it a second concept of identity, selfhood, which does not obey this same requisite, and define selfhood as a form of self-constancy which

¹⁰ See Ricœur 2013: 356. Let us note in passing that the first part of the definition is no less problematic than the second: "identical" cannot mean "extremely similar", since the identity relation is symmetrical (if $A=B$ and $B=C$ then $A=C$), whereas the relation of similarity (even "extreme") is not. At best, "identical" means *absolutely* similar, similar in all respects, and thus indiscernible.

is not based on any self-identity or *immutability*. In addition, it is only by virtue of this equivalence between the two concepts that narrative, as a “synthesis of the heterogeneous”, can articulate together the ideas of identity and variability that would otherwise be “contradictory”, and that narrative identity provides a solution to the “dialectic” of *idem* and *ipse*.¹¹ We could find many confirmations of this point in *Oneself as Another*. I do not have the space to examine them here, however.

Rather, we must at this stage get a little deeper into the logic of identity and investigate more closely the two concepts that I have only mentioned thus far: numerical identity and qualitative identity.

What is numerical identity? It is usually defined as the relation that each individual (thing, entity) bears to itself – and no other – throughout its existence. Alas, this definition is circular, as Wittgenstein pointed out.¹² But this problem does not concern me here. What matters, from the point of view of these reflections, is that identity thus defined, that is to say, identity in the sense that is at stake in the principle of identity ($A=A$), entails absolutely no immutability. For a thing to be identical with itself does not imply at all that we are dealing with something like an immutable substrate, a *hypokeimenon*. Numerical identity through time logically excludes the possibility for several individuals to be identical, but it does not exclude the possibility for an individual to receive different properties over time; the only thing it actually excludes, for this individual, is to receive different properties *at the same moment*. At time t_0 , if something is identical to itself, then it has all properties in common with itself, that is to say, it is indistinguishable from itself, but this does not imply that it is indistinguishable from itself at time t_1 , t_2 , etc. Far from excluding identity, change actually requires it, to the extent that it is only a numerically identical thing that can be said to “change” over time. On the condition that it be gradual and continuous, change does not destroy identity; it presupposes it.

Once again, the question to ask, I believe, is why Ricœur identifies numerical identity with immutability. And the answer seems to be, again, that this is due to the dependence of his conception on the traditional theories of the *cogito* and of the “I” (*Moi*). Indeed, Descartes was probably the first who, in order to justify the introduction of the *ego* in philosophy,¹³ advanced the view that bodies by themselves do not have a true identity, *insofar as they keep changing*, and that a true identity is the prerogative of the *ego* or mind. We can consider, for example, the letter to Mesland of February 9, 1645 in which Descartes distinguishes two senses of the body: the body as a mere aggregate of matter and a fragment of extension, on the one hand, and the body as “my body” on the other, that is to say the same material aggregate

¹¹ See Ricœur 1988: 246: “Unlike the abstract identity of the Same, narrative identity, constitutive of selfhood [*ipséité*], can include change, mutability [...] [I depart from Blarney and Pellauer who render “*ipséité*” by “self-constancy” in this passage – Translator].

¹² As Wittgenstein puts it: “to say of *two* things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of one thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing” (Wittgenstein 1922 proposition 5.5303). To say that a thing is identical to itself is to say that there are not two things, but a single one; and to say of one and the same thing that it is identical to itself is to say that a thing identical to itself is identical to itself, which is a pure tautology.

¹³ On the Cartesian innovation, see V. Carraud 2010.

inasmuch as it is united with a soul.¹⁴ In this text, Descartes asserts that it is only its binding to a mind, which, because indivisible and unchangeable, is absolutely the same, that gives the body its identity through time and makes it the same body, *idem numero* (numerically the same), despite the vicissitudes to which it is exposed, going as far as the amputation of a limb. Thus, bodies, for the most part, have only a purely nominal or conventional numerical identity, for they continuously change and lose their parts; only the mind or *ego*, as indivisible, form units (*unités*)¹⁵ in the strong sense. The equivalence identity=immutability¹⁶ remains, after Descartes, one of the main arguments in favor of the existence of spiritual indivisible units, for example in the Leibnizian *Monadology*, in which the requirement to discover in the world true identities, as opposed to merely apparent identities, leads to panpsychism. Given such conditions for a thing to be identical to itself, it is hardly surprising that sooner or later one is led to conclude that nothing in the world is really selfsame, and to make identity a mere pipe dream, as happens in Hume.¹⁷ This view of the “I” as true identity runs through all the metaphysics of the self up to and including Levinas, who defines the “I” (*le moi*) in *Totality and Infinity* as “identity *par excellence*, the original work of identification” (Levinas 1971: 6).

It is this same assumption that we find in *Oneself as Another*. But if the idea of immutability is not included in the idea of numerical identity, one of the basic justifications for the introduction of the concept of selfhood simply disappears.

The Necessity of Selfhood: Extending *Oneself as Another*

One should not misunderstand the meaning of these remarks, as critical as they are. My intention is certainly not to challenge the validity of the introduction into philosophy of the concept of selfhood, which seems to me rather a fruitful and necessary concept, probably the most fundamental innovation to come out of Ricœur’s book (and previously out of *Sein und Zeit*). I believe however – and this is what I felt the need to emphasize – that some aspects of the defense of this concept by Ricœur do not reach their intended goal, because Ricœur remains too dependent on the theories of the *ego* and the *cogito* with which, in many ways, he refuses to break.

In the rest of this article, I attempt to provide a justification for the concept of selfhood – a justification that takes into account the objections I have laid out and

¹⁴Cf. *Sixth Meditation: meum corpus, sive potius me totum*: (Descartes 1983: 81).

¹⁵The French word “*unité*” signifies “unit” both in the sense of being single individual and something that possesses unity in itself (Translator’s note).

¹⁶This consequence stands out explicitly in the discussion of the problem of the Eucharist in this same letter to Mesland: “That is to say, when we call it the surface of the bread, we mean that although the air which surrounds the bread is changed, the surface remains always numerically the same [*eadem numero*], provided the bread does not change, but changes with it if it does.” (Descartes 1991: 242.)

¹⁷See D. Hume 1978: 14: “This relation [of identity] I here consider as apply’d in its strictest sense to constant and unchangeable objects.”

thus demarcates itself from Ricœur's analyses, while remaining true – at least I hope – to his intention and some of his fundamental intuitions.

Selfhood is not a form of identity, just as little as it is a concept that could replace the concept of identity in its two main meanings: numerical and qualitative identity. Actually, identity (or sameness) and selfhood, far from being “irreducible” to each other, are quite complementary, insofar as they provide answers to two quite different kinds of questions. Identity answers the question “Who am I?” or “who is he/she?” But this question, in turn, can be understood in two different ways. The time has come to complement my foregoing remarks on the “logic of identity” by saying a few words about that variant of the identity I have so far left aside: qualitative identity.

In a number of cases, the question “Who is he/she?” calls for an identification; and this identification can take several forms, the most common of which is a nomination. To find out who a particular person is, the ordinary identity criteria are relevant: name, civil status, and perhaps fingerprints or DNA. However, there is a second, quite different way to understand this question. It may be, in fact, that by asking “who is he/she?” I do not seek to identify or re-identify someone, but to describe or define him/her. One might ask, for example, “who is he/she *really*?” and this would mean, then, for example: does the person really have the characteristics she presents at first sight? Is she as generous as she seems to be, as open-minded, etc.? The first interpretation of the question is the one that would prevail in a police interrogation, the second, the one that would be relevant, for example, in a biography, in which one seeks to investigate the particularity of a person, his most salient features or the most permanent aspects of her personality. There used to be a French collection published by *Éditions de la Manufacture* entitled “*Qui êtes-vous?* [Who are you?]" which would draw a portrait of writers and philosophers through their biography and an analysis of their work. If, in opening a volume of this collection, say the one dedicated to Levinas, we discovered fingerprints, it would be funny, no doubt, but totally incongruous. This collection did not aim to identify Levinas among other writers or intellectuals (the situation would then have been as follows: in the presence of a group of writers, we would have been asked to identify Levinas among them), it aimed to tell us *who Levinas was* in another sense: what kind of individual he was, and therefore, more generally what kind of writer, philosopher, etc. Such a question is no longer about numerical identity, but about qualitative identity.

Two things are qualitatively identical if they share certain properties, and they can therefore be *more or less* identical in this sense, in function of the number of shared properties. Numerical identity is an all or nothing affair: *A* is numerically identical to *B* or it is not. Qualitative identity, by contrast, admits of degrees: two pure-breed Arabians share more properties than two horses of different breeds. Numerical identity is a *complete* qualitative identity. It is important to note a key characteristic of qualitative identity that explains why it has often been neglected – in favor of numerical identity – among the philosophers who have investigated personal identity: it is “non-individualizing”. This means that it does not provide necessary and sufficient conditions for determining a person's identity. Indeed, it

comprises *general* properties (such as “being a philosopher” or “being a writer”) that their bearer, by definition, is not the only one to possess, and even if we imagine a description so complete that it would occupy an entire volume (for example, a work in the collection “Who are you?”) nothing would forbid us to imagine that this description applies to several individuals. Qualitative identity answers the question of what *kind* of individual Levinas is, and not that of which among a plurality of individuals is Levinas.

Let us emphasize that the question in the first-person singular “Who am I?” nearly always concerns qualitative identity; one must imagine extremely unusual situations, like total amnesia, for this question to inquire into my numerical identity.

I believe that qualitative identity – and not numerical identity – is the royal road to the formulation of the question of the “self”, contrary to the opinion by far the most widespread among philosophers.¹⁸ Indeed, among all the predicates that belong to a description of myself, a decisive distinction emerges between certain predicates which are what they are apart from the question of what attitude I maintain toward them, and others about which my attitude towards them is, by contrast, an key element for the attribution to myself of these same predicates. It is not the same to define someone by the color of his skin and his ethnicity, on the one hand, or by his aspirations and fundamental convictions on the other. The reason for this is precisely that we do not maintain the same kind of relationship towards predicates of the first type as we do towards predicates of the second. A conviction cannot be our conviction apart from the question of whether or not we endorse it, that is to say, of whether we are willing to recognize it as ours, and, consequently, of whether we can advance reasons in favor of its truth. Our birth date or contingent physical characteristics are ours whether we like them or not, and whether we take them to be our own or not: here the idea of endorsing them makes no sense.

We can thus distinguish, within qualitative identity, two aspects, which we may call, respectively, “third-personal identity” and “first-personal identity”. The former is what it is regardless of the relationship that I bear with it, the latter calls for my attitudes and my commitments, to the extent that its content depends in an essential way on what I take to be true or false, what I endorse or refuse to endorse, what I care about or am indifferent to, etc., that is to say, my fundamental attitudes. Thus, the predicates of my first-personal identity (my beliefs, desires, intentions, plans, tastes, preferences, my more or less permanent affective dispositions) cannot pertinently be attributed to me unless I maintain a certain type of relationship with them, unless I endorse them (in the case of beliefs), or assume them or hold myself personally responsible for them (in the case of intentions or plans), or am willing to acknowledge them and accept their consequences (in the case of desires, tendencies

¹⁸Among the rare exceptions, we must count Marya Schechtman, whose *The Constitution of Selves*, (Schechtman 1982) distinguishes the *re-identification question*, which has served as the guiding theme for nearly all the authors who have reflected on personal identity, from the *characterization question*, which seems to her more apt to capture the aspects of identity which “really count” from a philosophical point of view.

or emotional reactions, which, to some extent at least, exceed my will). We could speak, in all these cases, of various forms of responsibility, provided we understand "responsibility" in a broad enough sense to include both responsibility regarding what I decide and accomplish voluntarily and responsibility regarding what occurs spontaneously in me, but is nevertheless expressive of myself (as in the case of an emotional reaction) and on which I exercise nonetheless a form of responsibility, insofar as I not only can admit my feelings to myself or not, but also act upon them, at least indirectly; I may not be able to modify them at my whim, but I can at least *try* to redirect or to influence them. If some conduct has revealed my cowardice, for example, it probably will not suffice for me to decide to be less cowardly in the future, because we are dealing here with that sphere of the infra-voluntary on which Ricœur meditated at length in his early works. But I am myself concerned and involved in this cowardice because I can at least adopt indirect strategies to try to get rid of it and increase my courage: this cowardice is *incumbent on me*, and I am therefore responsible for it to some extent.

I will not try to further analyze the different forms of responsibility that are at stake here, but I will advance the following claim: unlike our third-personal identity which is what it is regardless of our attitude with respect to it, our first-personal identity strongly depends on the relationship we maintain with it, that is to say, on our modalities of responsibility, and that is why it defines us so much more "intimately" than the first. Third-personal identity is based on characteristics that identify us regardless of our attitudes toward these characteristics; first-personal identity defines us on the basis of features that are what they are only insofar as we endorse and assume them, that is to say, exercise an inalienable responsibility regarding them (responsibility that admits several levels and several modalities, which I will not try to clarify further).

We may call "selfhood" this aspect of our (qualitative) identity that each of us can vouch for, and contribute to defining by the very fact of vouching for it, that part of our identity that is *incumbent on us* and *engages us* in an irreplaceable way. Not that I would be the only one able to say what I am in that sense. Even in saying what we want or what we believe, we are not infallible, others can contribute to making us more lucid and more honest with ourselves – and this, in my view, is the fundamentally hermeneutic element of the conception that I am proposing. If there is a primacy of the first-person to define oneself, this primacy is not *absolute* and it rests, even less, on a pure and simple infallibility (or "apodictic evidence"). We must here, once and for all, turn away from the philosophies of the *cogito* and reject the idea of an "epistemic privilege of the first person," to borrow an expression which has become customary in analytic philosophy. However, even if I possess no absolute certainty concerning what I believe desire or hope, immune to any possible revision, it remains the case that such predicates of my qualitative identity (beliefs, aspirations, projects, etc.) are "incumbent on me" in a quite specific sense and implicate the various modalities of my responsibility in an essential way. We cannot have a desire without being required to vouch for it; we must be able to admit it and recognize it for it to be *our* desire.

Now, it is exactly on this point that emerges not only the possibility, but the *necessity* to introduce the concept of selfhood in philosophy. As Heidegger and Ricœur have noted, selfhood is closely linked to an attitude or a way of being. As they have also emphasized, it is linked to the problem of identity. But contrary to what the former suggested and what the latter expressly asserted, selfhood is not another kind of identity that could compete with identity in its twofold meaning: numerical and qualitative. Selfhood and “sameness”, as Ricœur calls them, far from being mutually exclusive, are perfectly complementary. Selfhood *presupposes* “sameness”: first, because it presupposes the numerical identity of the person whose selfhood it is; next, because it is closely related to that part of my identity for which it falls to me to take responsibility in the first-person. Selfhood can then, depending on the choice of a convention, designate two things: either that core of my identity which is my business and that I contribute to defining, for which I occupy a quite singular position in determining what it is, insofar as it depends itself on my attitude towards it; or, better the *ability to adopt such an attitude* that underlies the very possibility of having an identity in the first-personal sense. According to the second definition, my selfhood would be my *ability* to adopt a certain attitude towards these most central features of my identity, features that I do not just happen to have, but that I have only insofar as I am committed in some manner to them; more precisely, selfhood would be my ability to adopt the attitude of vouching for them and assuming a certain responsibility for them in front of others. Or again, my selfhood is *my ability to vouch for, in front of others, that part of my first-personal (qualitative) identity for which my doing so is precisely the necessary condition of my having such an identity, (or, of it being my identity).*

We return thus to what was, I believe, the fundamental intuition of Ricœur’s great book, and especially to the essential link it establishes between selfhood and otherness. For such a capacity can only be: first, a capacity in front of and for another; and, second, a capacity awakened in me by another and that I can only acquire by his intermediary: it is the other, and only the other, who calls me to responsibility – to adopt Levinas’s fine expression. We are then quite far from Heideggerian resoluteness and from a selfhood that can be conceived of entirely in terms of a solitary and silent face-to-face with death. By contrast, my conception of selfhood rests on a fundamental asymmetry: I cannot acquire such a capacity by myself nor call myself to such a responsibility; only others can address this request to me and formulate this requirement. I am not at the origin of this capacity by which nevertheless I am myself, that is to say, exist in the mode of selfhood. I believe this to be the fundamental intuition of *Oneself as Another*, but articulated in another idiom. May I have been at least a bit faithful to this great philosophy of faithfulness!

(Translated by Samuel Webb)

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For a Genealogy of Selfhood: Starting from Paul Ricœur

Carmine Di Martino

Abstract The aim of the present paper is at the same time extremely broad and very circumscribed: broad, because I deal with the great topic of Ricœur’s mature work, *Oneself as Another*, that is to say with the dialectics of the self and the other, of selfhood and otherness; circumscribed, because I focus on one of the figures of otherness proposed by Ricœur, specifically the second one – the relation of intersubjectivity –, and I question its “constitutive” relation to selfhood even beyond Ricœur’s perspective, referring for instance to Patočka. In this way, starting from Ricœur’s hermeneutics of the self I retrace and propose a genealogy of selfhood that reveals the other as the essential condition for the constitution of the self. To reach this goal, the paper is divided into four parts: the first one introduces the problem of the “subject” after Heidegger, the second one tackles the issue of the selfhood of the self as it is conceived by Ricœur, the third one analyzes the role of the other and intersubjectivity in the constitution of the self, and the fourth one investigates how and why the other is the key concept for thinking the genealogy of selfhood.

Keywords Genealogy • Selfhood • Self • Otherness • Ricœur

Thinking the “Subject” after Heidegger

The task of this chapter is at the same time extremely broad and very circumscribed: broad, because I will deal with the great topic of Ricoeur’s mature work, *Oneself as Another*, that is to say with the dialectics of the self and the other, of selfhood and otherness; circumscribed, because I intend to focus on one of the figures of otherness proposed by Ricœur, specifically the second one, and to question its “constitutive” relation to selfhood even beyond Ricœur’s own perspective. I will constantly start from and keep as point of reference the programmatic statement at the beginning of the “Introduction” to *Oneself as Another*:

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A kind of otherness that is not (or not merely) the result of comparison is suggested by our title, otherness of a kind that can be constitutive of selfhood as such. *Oneself as Another* suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other, as we might say in Hegelian terms. To “as” I should like to attach a strong meaning, not only that of a comparison (oneself similar to another) but indeed that of an implication (oneself inasmuch as being other) (Ricœur 1992: 3).

I will ask, with and beyond Ricœur, what it means to think a kind of “otherness (...) that can be constitutive of selfhood as such” and therefore to “to account for the work of otherness at the heart of selfhood” (Ricœur 1992: 318).

The choice of the terms “self” and “selfhood” embodies and promotes a philosophical constellation rooted in what can be considered – beyond the warning and reticence of its author – the most important treatise on the “self” of the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. The phenomenological hermeneutics of the self that Ricœur achieves definitively and with great maturity in *Oneself as Another*, later developed further in *The Course of Recognition*, represents perhaps the most important philosophical attempt within the line of existential hermeneutics inaugurated by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Valuing and integrating various contributions in line with the dialogical and dialectical style of Ricœur’s process, phenomenological hermeneutics inherits the task of elaborating an interpretation of the human existent that definitively abandons the substantialism of identity – that is, Cartesian ontology, which considers the subject a substance, a thing, a *res*, or even a *cogitans* – without ending up in reductionism. It is well known that to avoid this alternative, Heidegger totally rejects the modern lexicon of subjectivity, including Husserl’s notion of consciousness, and suggests the term *Dasein*, to highlight the need to question genuinely the Being of “human being”: in fact, to the extent that the problem of the Being of that entities that we are ourselves is not explicitly and positively pondered, any appeal to the irreducibility of the “I”, of consciousness, of subjectivity falls flat and the sense of being of the “I” implicitly continues to be determined by the ontology of the “thing”, of *Vorhandenheit*, as Heidegger writes. So, to answer the question of Being and of the sense of the Being of *Dasein*, one must phenomenologically begin from the “how” (*wie*) of existence and not from the “what” (*Was*). That is to say that one must begin from the modes of being (*Weise zu sein*) of *Dasein* instead of from metaphysical presuppositions regarding its essence, which are intrinsically compromised by an ontology of substance. In this way, Heidegger reaches that unitary meaning of the Being of *Dasein* that is “care” (*Sorge*), and hence “temporality” (*Zeitlichkeit*) as the sense of this Being. Now, “selfhood” (*Selbstheit*) belongs to the fundamental modes of being of *Dasein* and corresponds to her/his being and deciding to be “herself/himself” (*Ipse, Selbst*), as opposed to losing herself/himself in the anonymity of the “they-self” (*das Man*), of the public world, of average everydayness, of every time one says: “they do, they think, they die...”.

Ricœur outlines a hermeneutics of selfhood and of the self, by analogy with the development and conceptual determinations of *Being and Time*, interpreting – differently from Heidegger – selfhood more as a figure of identity than as a mode of

Being of *Dasein*, and the self – the *ipse* of this selfhood – as a synonym for *Dasein*, as a subject who “recognizes itself” in and through its realizations, rather than in a Cartesian perspective as self-positing and self-founding. The preeminence that Heidegger attributes to care is now given, instead, to action (Ricœur speaks of “the analogical unity of action” in this regard). The self and selfhood are the core of Ricœur’s attempt to think the “subject” after Heidegger, in the perspective opened by the question of *Dasein*. My aim here is not to discuss the legitimacy and the reasons of this “translation” on Ricœur’s part of the conceptual apparatus of *Being and Time*, but simply to recall the grounds in which the three “major philosophical intentions” (Ricœur 1992: 1) that preside over the elaboration of the research comprising *Oneself as Another* are rooted, and to embark on an understanding of the “selfhood of oneself” that “implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought without the other”. Let us move on as quickly as possible to the problem.

The Selfhood of the Self

The “first intention” that runs through this work concerns the dialectic of analysis and of reflection that motivates the recourse to the “self” instead of the “I”. According to this intention, rather than the “immediate positing of the subject”, the primacy of “reflexive mediation” must be underscored, – as it expresses itself in the first person singular: “I think”, “I am” – and to oppose the “self” to the “I”, by employing the grammatical possibilities of natural languages. In Ricœur’s philosophical anthropology the choice in favor of the self reiterates from the very beginning the distance from philosophies of *ego* and consciousness that are centered around the immediacy of the I’s self-perception. The (alleged) evidence of the self-givenness of the *cogito* represents the nucleus of Cartesianism that, through Brentano, afflicts Husserl’s phenomenology as well, although it does not let itself be reduced to that influence. The self is not given immediately to itself in a self-perception, but can be grasped through a reflexive mediation, in a “re-cognition”. For Ricœur, the subject “returns” to itself, recognizes itself, beginning with its own externalizations, in which obviously the body, the other and the world in the different possible senses are implicated. The answer of Ricœur’s hermeneutics to the question “who?”, that Heidegger asked in relation to *Dasein* as Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*), is not “I”, but the “self”. “To say *self* is not to say *I*. The *I* is posited – or is deposed. The *self* is implied reflexively in the operations, the analysis of which precedes the return toward this self” (Ricœur 1992: 18). So to embark on the problem of the self, one must start with action, going backwards up the long path that leads to actualizations, embodiments, realizations (of the subject) all the way to the self, and not vice-versa. The self, then, is a mobile end of a line, and not a starting point that is self-possessed transparently: it reaches itself through intentional (self) externalizations, it “achieves” itself in the rebound of (its) operations. Here is his debt towards his first teacher:

I am indebted to Jean Nabert – Ricœur points out in *The Course of Recognition* –, for having attended to the detour through the “object” side of experiences considered from the point of view of the capacities employed. This detour through the “what” and the “how”, before returning to the “who”, seems to me explicitly required by the reflexive character of the self, which, in the moment of self-designation, recognizes itself (Ricœur 2005: 93).

Thus, we have an idea of the distance between Ricœur’s hermeneutics of the self and the philosophies of the *Cogito*, without implying a firm stance in favor of the defeat of the *Cogito*. Ricœur keeps his distance both from the “Cartesian” self-positing and self-founding of the *Cogito* and from its “Nietzschean” destitution.

Ricœur’s inquiry into the self proceeds through the polysemy of the question about the “who?”, the different ways it is expressed – “Who is speaking of what? Who does what? About whom and about what does one construct a narrative? Who is morally responsible for what?” (Ricœur 1992: 19) – and finds its thematic unity in action: “To this extent, the philosophy that comes out of this work deserves to be termed a practical philosophy” (Ricœur 1992: 19). In *The Course of Recognition*, Ricœur again sets up the problem in terms of a phenomenology of the capable man, of the “I can”, in which the power or ability to say, to act in the world, to say something and about oneself (giving shape to the idea of the narrative unity of a life), to attribute the origin of one’s acts to oneself, as well as the ability to remember and to promise.

It is well known that the “second intention” of *Oneself as Another* consists in distinguishing between two meanings of identity, by employing the two meanings of “identical” (the *même* of *soi-même*) that the Latin language offers: *idem* and *ipse*. On one hand we have sameness, *idem*-identity, and on the other selfhood, *ipse*-identity.

Identity in the sense of *idem* unfolds an entire hierarchy of significations, [...]. In this hierarchy, permanence in time constitutes the highest order, to which will be opposed that which differs, in the sense of changing or variable. Our thesis throughout will be that identity in the sense of *ipse* implies no assertion concerning some unchanging core of the personality (Ricœur 1992: 2).

Therefore, two different meanings of identity are in opposition: the unchangeable identity of the *idem*, the same, and the mobile identity of the *ipse*, the self, which as we will see represent two models of permanence in time. Every philosophy of selfhood is based on this distinction. The factors that pinpoint the topic are offered by the fifth study of *Oneself as Another*. Here, selfhood emerges from the difference of sameness, in the framework of an analytically based debate on the problem of personal identity – in reference, particularly, to Derek Parfit’s claims – developed in a very reductionist way. What is at stake in the distinction between the two problems of identity is the avoidance of both the Cartesian brand of substantialism and the analytically based reductionism, e.g. that of Parfit, for whom everything occurs “on a plane where identity can signify only sameness, to the express exclusion of any distinction between sameness and selfhood” (Ricœur 1992: 130).

Recalling the issues of the debate, Ricœur thus argues for the necessity of distinguishing two poles of personal identity: sameness and selfhood, highlighting that only selfhood can be used to answer the question: “Who am I?”. The starting point

of the presentation is identity viewed as sameness, of which Ricœur pinpoints four meanings: numerical identity, qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity through change, permanence in time. Numerical identity is such that someone is only one and the same individual, that one and not another, unique in different occurrences. In juridical terms, it allows for identification and re-identification. Qualitative identity consists, instead, in the possession of certain aspects or properties; in other words, it is what we call character, a series of distinctive features of an individual. When we say that this person “is no longer the same”, we mean that his character has changed: the person is numerically identical, but qualitatively different. The extreme resemblance between two or more occurrences “can then be invoked as an indirect criterion to reinforce the presumption of numerical identity” (Ricœur 1992: 116). But, given the weakness of such a criterion of similarity, “whenever growth or aging operate as factors of dissemblance and, by implication, of numerical diversity” (Ricœur 1992: 117), it is better to employ the criterion of “the *uninterrupted continuity* between the first and the last stage in the development of what we consider to be the same individual” (Ricœur 1992: 117). However, the threat that time represents for identity is ultimately evaded effectively only if one can place as the grounds for similarity and uninterrupted continuity in change a principle of permanence over time, something like an “invariable structure”, for example, an individual’s genetic code. The idea of structure

confirms the relational character of identity, which does not appear in the ancient formulation of substance but which Kant reestablishes by classifying substance among the categories of relation, as the condition of the possibility of conceiving of change as happening to something which does not change (Ricœur 1992: 117–118).

In this way, permanence over time becomes “the transcendental of numerical identity” (Ricœur 1992: 118).

Now, Ricœur’s thesis is that as long as one remains at sameness the question “What I am?” can be answered adequately, but not the question “Who am I?”. Sameness, with its permanence over time, is an identity described objectively, so to speak, in “the third person”. It says *what* I am, my identity considered in the same way as an observable reality in the world, but it does not say who I am, my personal singularity. Obviously, the problem cannot be resolved simply by introducing DNA, albeit I certainly am characterized by it. According to Ricœur, another meaning of identity needs to be applied, that is to say, “selfhood”, the “self”, which implies an irreducible reference to the “first person” perspective, and to the principle of “belonging to me” (*appartenance mienne*, cf. Ricœur 1992: 133) of the experiences concerning me. This can be understood if we take, as Ricœur invites us to, “character” as emblematic synthesis of sameness. It ensures all of the four meanings just listed simultaneously: numerical identity, qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity in change, and permanence over time (see Ricœur 1992: 121). Inasmuch as it is the core of acquired dispositions, habits and acquired identifications, character – along with the biological identity marked out by the genetic code and displayed by fingerprints, physiognomy, gait, voice, accidental physical marks etc. (see Ricœur 2005: 102) – belongs to those traits of permanence over time that identify an

individual, make one recognizable as “the same”. And yet, it is precisely character, when adequately understood, that compels us to implicate selfhood and the first person discourse, the “always mine”. In fact, when questioning character as an “acquired disposition” (Ricœur 1992: 120), its temporal dimension emerges. First of all, every habit, in the double role of habit that is being acquired and habit that has already been acquired, reveals that character has a history, even though within this history sedimentation tends to obscure the innovation that preceded it. Thus sedimentation, which gives character its specific permanence and objectivity, seems to achieve “the return from freedom to nature” (Ricœur 1992: 121), an absorption of the *ipse* (of the “first person” perspective) on the part of the *idem* (of the “third person” perspective); but this absorption cannot cancel the fact that “precisely as second nature, my character is me, myself, *ipse*” (Ricœur 1992: 121), even though this *ipse* presents itself as *idem*. Secondly, through acquired identifications “the other enters into the composition of the same” (Ricœur 1992: 121): as a consequence, the identification *with* the values or to the ideals *in* which an individual recognizes himself implies the necessary assuming of this otherness, a commitment towards it, without which those values or ideals would never become *mine*. Therefore, the development of habits and the acquisition of identifications, in one way or another lead back to decisions that go on to make up character. “This proves that one cannot think the *idem* of the person through without considering the *ipse*, even when one entirely covers over the other” (Ricœur 1992: 121). The two poles of identity meet each other and their mediation will be narrative identity, as is well-known.

An exemplary representation of the protrusion of selfhood onto sameness – without forgetting the dialectical connection between them – is the faithfulness to a word that has been given. In fact, in the keeping of a promise, one can see at work how “a *self-constancy* which cannot be inscribed, as character was, within the dimension of something in general but solely within the dimension of ‘who’” (Ricœur 1992: 123). Thus the *ipse* is freed from the *idem* and a mode of permanence over time occurs that is the polar opposite of the one related to character:

The perseverance of character is one thing, the perseverance of faithfulness to a word that has been given is something else again. The continuity of character is one thing, the constancy of friendship is quite another. In this regard, Heidegger is right to distinguish the permanence of substance from *self-subsistence* (*Selbst-Ständigkeit*) (Ricœur 1992: 123).

In the keeping of one’s word a way of challenging time is achieved, a resistance to change that cannot be assimilated to that of character, that has an irreducible ethical core, the sense of taking on a responsibility: “even if my desire were to change, even if I were to change my opinion or my inclination, ‘I will hold firm.’” (Ricœur 1992: 124). This form of permanence over time cannot be led back “to the determination of a *substratum*”, to the “schema of the category of substance” (Ricœur 1992: 118). Here the necessity of selfhood emerges: *who* is making the promise, *who* is keeping his word, *who* considers herself responsible for her actions? This *who* is a *self*, an *ipse*. So then, what characterizes selfhood? The “power of self-designation”, of ascribing experiences to oneself, of recognizing oneself in one’s abilities, of

considering oneself responsible for one's actions: this – this “reflexivity” fully justifies self-designation – is what “that makes the person not merely a unique type of thing but a self” (Ricœur 1992: 32). As Ricœur states elsewhere, the gap separating *idem* from *ipse* is the same that ontologically distinguishes *Dasein* and *Vorhanden/Zuhanden*. Only *Dasein* is mine, and more generally is a self. This principle of “belonging to me” (*appartenance mienne*, cf. Ricœur 1992: 133) expresses the irreducible nucleus of a conception of the “subject” that is not reductionist and “the resistance of the question ‘who?’ to its elimination in an impersonal description” (Ricœur 1992: 138). The most telling expression of this resistance is the formula that sums up Parfit's entire argument: “‘My claim’” – is Parfit's “symptomatic” claim – is that “‘we could describe our lives in an *impersonal* way’” (Ricœur 1992: 138, n. 29).

The Problem of Otherness

The “third philosophical intention” explains the title of the major work: *Oneself as Another*. Selfhood “involves a dialectic complementary to that of selfhood and sameness, namely the dialectic of *self* and the *other than self*” (Ricœur 1992: 3). However, the two dialectics are not comparable: the dialectics between self and other possessed an entirely peculiar trait and is “more fundamental”. In fact, as long as we remain at the level of *idem*-identity, the identity/otherness relationship is of a comparative and external type: the other can be similar, distinct, different, opposite etc. When we place ourselves at the level of *ipse*-identity, the selfhood/otherness relationship takes on the meaning of an original and constitutive implication.

The fact that otherness is not added on to selfhood from outside, as though to prevent its solipsistic drift, but that it belongs instead to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological constitution of selfhood is a feature that strongly distinguishes this third dialectic from that of selfhood and sameness, which maintains a preeminently disjunctive character (Ricœur 1992: 317).

This is the relevant point: I would like to take this statement radically, to try to outline a *genealogy of selfhood*, starting from Ricœur, but in a perspective that is not strictly Ricœurian.

Having stated that otherness is not added on to selfhood from the outside, but rather belongs to its ontological makeup, the problem of how “to account for the work of otherness at the heart of selfhood” (Ricœur 1992: 318) must be faced. Ricœur observes that the phenomenological counterpart to the category of otherness is a “variety of experiences of passivity” (Ricœur 1992: 318), which characterize various modes of human action. The otherness “joined to selfhood is attested to only in a wide range of dissimilar experiences, following a diversity of centers of otherness” (Ricœur 1992: 318). These centers pivot around three main dimensions, which constitute the “triad of passivity and, hence, of otherness” (Ricœur 1992: 318): the flesh, the foreign, conscience.

First, there is the passivity represented by the experience of one's own body – or better, as we shall say later, of the *flesh* – as the mediator between the self and a world which is itself taken in accordance with its variable degrees of practicability and so of foreignness. Next, we find the passivity implied by the relation of the self to the *foreign*, in the precise sense of the other (than) self, and so the otherness inherent in the relation of intersubjectivity. Finally, we have the most deeply hidden passivity, that of the relation of the self to itself, which is *conscience* in the sense of *Gewissen* (Ricoeur 1992: 318).

I will concentrate on the second level of otherness, the other from oneself, because it is paramount in the perspective of a genealogy of selfhood, as I will try to show: there would be no establishment of one's own body nor formation of conscience, understood as *Gewissen*, without the otherness inherent to the relation of intersubjectivity.

By tackling the relationship between the self and the other from oneself, Ricoeur immediately highlights its radicalness:

Here the Other is not only the counterpart of the Same but belongs to the intimate constitution of its sense. Indeed, on the properly phenomenological level, the multiple ways in which the other than self affects the understanding of the self by itself marks, precisely, the difference between the *ego* that posits itself and the *self* that recognizes itself only through these very affections (Ricoeur 1992: 329).

Thus, the specific passivity of being-affected, along with the other expressions of the selfhood/otherness dialectics, prevents the self from playing the role of foundation and distinguishes it from an *ego* that posits itself. This is true on all the levels Ricoeur deals with in his analysis: linguistic, practical, narrative, ethical. On a linguistic level, for example, “the speaker's self-designation appeared to be intertwined [...] to the speech situation by virtue of which every participant is affected by the speech addressed to him or to her” (Ricoeur 1992: 329). With reference to action, “the self-designation of the agent of action appeared to be inseparable from the ascription by another, who designates me in the accusative as the author of my actions” (Ricoeur 1992: 329). In line with this, going over the phenomenology of the capable human being, at each step one could bring to light the otherness implied in the exercise of each of the modes of the “I can”, that is to say, the mode in which otherness is concretely at work at the heart of selfhood.

Now another problem arises: what Same-Other dialectic fulfills “the demand for a phenomenology of the *self affected* by the other than self” (Ricoeur 1992: 331)? In what terms should the relation between the two poles be conceived? Is it symmetrical or asymmetrical? And, in the latter case, which pole of this relation should have priority? Ricoeur observes that in phenomenology two different conceptions of asymmetry are in opposition: Husserl's and Lévinas's. In the former case, asymmetry proceeds from the self to the other. In fact, the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation* is the most radical attempt to account for the other and its otherness, starting from the *ego*: the alter ego “sense”, just like the sense of being of any entity, is necessarily constituted in the egological consciousness (according to the phenomenological meaning of “constitution”, which is obviously not “construction”). In the latter case, asymmetry proceeds in the opposite direction, from the other to the self. Starting with Lévinas's overturning, which considers ethics to be the first philosophy, it is

the other that, in its irreducible transcendence and externality, calls me out and thus constitutes me, calls me to responsibility: “Since the initiative belongs wholly to the Other, it is in the accusative – a mode well named – that the I is met by the injunction and made capable of answering, again in the accusative: ‘It’s me here!’” (Ricœur 1992: 337–8). In the background of these antithetical stances, Ricœur wants to show that the dialectic of the Same and the Other is never unilateral, in both of the two senses conceivable of their relation. From this comparison between Husserl and Lévinas

results the suggestion that there is no contradiction in holding the movement from the Same toward the Other and that from the Other toward the Same to be dialectically complementary. The two movements do not annihilate one another to the extent that one unfolds in thegnoseological dimension of sense, the other in the ethical dimension of injunction (Ricœur 1992: 340–1).

Now setting aside the details, I am interested in the meaning of Ricœur’s discussion of Husserl’s and Lévinas’s positions (replayed more or less in the same terms in *The Course of Recognition*). In fact, differently from his interlocutors and in line with his overall standpoint, his stance goes in the direction of symmetry and reciprocity. He wants to underscore the “this *intersecting* dialectic of oneself and the other than self” (Ricœur 1992: 441), the necessary complementarity between reference to the self and reference to others, self-affection and being-affected, power of self-designation and call to responsibility. Between the two poles there is always a balanced relationship of mutual implication. At the end of his discussion, Ricœur clearly sums it up: “Was not this *intersecting* dialectic of oneself and the other than self anticipated in the analysis of the promise? If another were not counting on me, would I be capable of keeping my word, of maintaining myself?” (Ricœur 1992: 341).

In *The Course of Recognition*, in a different context, Ricœur returns to this question, with a modification. After the long development of the argument, recalling the phenomenology of the capable human being to which he devotes the central chapters of the text, he observes: “a rereading of the pages devoted to the exploration of human capacities should join to each modality of the ‘I can’ an often tacit correlation between self-assertion and some reference to others” (Ricœur 2005: 252). Thus, a development of capacities would have to be rewritten, taking into account this “tacit” element. “If it is possible to abstract from every bond of intersubjectivity in analyzing capacities on the level of potential actions, the passage from a capacity to its exercise does not allow for such an elision” (Ricœur 2005: 252–3). Thus, the self-other dialectic presents itself again, this time as passage from capacity to practice, since the otherness inherent in the inter-subjective relationship appears as indispensable condition to its practice. However, Ricœur adds immediately that if intersubjectivity is “one manifest condition of such an exercise, it is not, like the power to act, its ground” (Ricœur 2005: 253). Then, on one hand, we must state that “others” are a necessary condition for the activation of capabilities, and that therefore there is no *self* without an *other*; while on the other hand, we must also specify that “others” are not a foundation, because they assume the “potentiality” that

enable them to become a reality that they do not produce: “self-recognition refers to others without this reference’s assuming the position of a ground, like that of the power to act” (Ricœur 2005: 255). Thus, if the main virtue of the selfhood-otherness dialectic is to “keep the self from occupying the place of foundation” (Ricœur 1992: 318), this does not mean that this “place” is taken up by the *other*: the foundation is represented by the “faculty of action”. This – and I mention it in passing – explains why when he attempts to define an “ontology of selfhood” Ricœur introduces a re-interpretation of the Aristotelian perspective of being according to act and potency:

The central character of action and its decentering in the direction of a *ground* of actuality and of potentiality are two features that equally and conjointly constitute an ontology of selfhood in terms of actuality and potentiality. This apparent paradox attests to the fact that, if there is a being of the self – in other words, if an ontology of selfhood is possible – this is in conjunction with a ground starting from which the self can be said to be *acting* (Ricœur 1992: 308).

Human action emerges upon this ground of being, “at once potentiality and actuality” (Ricœur 1992: 318). I am not interested here in discussing the terms of this ontology of selfhood. Rather, I will attempt to put some elements of Ricœur’s analysis to work in defining a genealogy of selfhood, as I said previously.

Recognizing the Other

The guiding question in a genealogy of selfhood could be expressed as follows: if the capacity for self-designation in speech, action, storytelling, and ethical commitment defines the self; if the reflexive consciousness implied in recognizing the self as responsible for its own acts characterizes that which Ricœur calls selfhood; if, therefore, selfhood is the ability to attribute to oneself one’s (own) experience, and of perceiving reflexively – in terms of Heidegger’s *Jemeinigkeit* of *Dasein* – the “mineness” (Ricœur 1992: 137) of my psychic and bodily lived experience (that of which we say: it is “my” body, they are “my” memories, “my” aspirations, “my” plans ... “my” survival), how and under what conditions can this selfhood emerge and express itself, given the fact that is it not automatic?

The emergence of selfhood outlines its difference from sameness, from *idem*-identity, numerical and qualitative identity. But although it is open and promised at birth, this difference becomes explicit only after the fact and there is always the possibility for it not to be realized. In other words, the constitution of the self occurs when the mode of Being of *Dasein* is achieved. This, on the one hand, is given simply because one belongs to the species *Homo sapiens*, but on the other hand, it always needs to be activated: the vocation to selfhood must be fulfilled in each individual. In short, the unfolding of the human is not guaranteed. This means that selfhood is not a mere datum, but – to use Ricœur’s terminology – it is a “capacity” that needs to be put into “practice”. So, what makes its emergence possible?

I intend to analyze Ricœur’s grammatical claims regarding the selfhood-otherness dialectic and the symmetry-asymmetry of this relationship in light of this

very question. “*Oneself as Another* – as I mentioned above – suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other” (Ricœur 1992: 3). And again: “The fact that otherness is not added on to selfhood from outside, as though to prevent its solipsistic drift, but that it belongs instead to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological constitution of selfhood” (Ricœur 1992: 317). This is the distinctive feature of the selfhood-otherness dialectic. What happens to this dialectic when it is questioned from the perspective of genealogy? And again: how can we account for the work of otherness in the heart of selfhood?

Ricœur touches on the problem tangentially in *The Course of Recognition* (and in a passage from *Oneself as Another*). The reference occurs specifically during the discussion about Hegel’s *Anerkennung*, through the “reactualization” (Ricœur 2005: 174) offered by Honneth with the title of “Struggle for Recognition”, in reference to which the topic of “Self-recognition [...] puts us on the way toward the problematic of being recognized” (Ricœur 2005: 93). Here “the passive form of the verb ‘recognize’ is essential, inasmuch as each individual’s self-recognition, which in the preceding chapter was placed in the position of a principle, is henceforth a result” (Ricœur 2005: 173). What appeared as a “principle”, self-recognition, now occupies the position of a “result”, made possible by being-recognized, that is, through the recognition of the other, in a mutual recognition.

Ricœur highlights the fact that Honneth draws from Mead the resources for an actualization of Hegel’s *Anerkennung*, specifically taking from his work the model for a social genesis of the identification of the “I”. Furthermore:

From his reconstruction of Hegel’s Jena writings in the first part of his book, he [Honneth] borrows the idea of an interconnected sequence of ‘three models of intersubjective recognition’, placed successively under the aegis of love, law, and social respect (Ricœur 2005: 187).

The most relevant one, for our present purposes, is the first model: “The first model of recognition, placed under the heading of love, covers a range that encompasses erotic relations, friendship, and family ties ‘constituted by strong emotional attachments among a small number of people’” (Ricœur 2005: 188), in which Hegel’s formula “knowing oneself likewise in its other” (Ricœur 2005: 189) finds its first area of application.

Thus, the path of self-recognition, of acquiring one’s selfhood, would begin with the being-recognized that love generates. It is not by chance that Honneth, in his attempt to actualize Hegel’s *Anerkennung*, searches “in the psychoanalytic theory of object relations an empirical complement to Hegelian speculation as it applies to this first model of recognition” (Ricœur 2005: 189), addressing those among Freud’s successors who have focused primarily on the mother-child relationship as fundamental condition for the psychic development of the human individual. A pioneer of this psychoanalytic trend, René Spitz, in *First Year of Life*, highlight that “Freud reminds us that the infant (...) is helpless and incapable of surviving by his own means. What the infant lacks, the mother compensates for and supplies. The mother provides for all his needs” (Spitz 1965: 4). Indeed for a newborn the environment is

made up of a single individual, so to speak: the mother or a stand-in. His research highlights a fundamental element: during the first year of the child's life, "the mother, the human partner of the child, who mediates every perception, every action, every insight, every knowledge" (Spitz 1965: 96). "The importance – he insists – of the mother's feelings about having a child, and her own child in particular, can hardly be overrated. [...] They create what I have called the *emotional climate* in the mother-child relation" (Spitz 1965: 29). What Spitz is most struck with is that "the unfolding of affective perception and affective exchanges precedes all other psychic functions; the latter will subsequently develop on the foundations provided by affective exchange" (Spitz 1965: 140). Therefore, the affectionate relationship between mother and child opens the gate to every other form of development and inaugurate the "process which will transform the infant into a human" (Spitz 1965: 141).

These observations taken from psychoanalytic theory need to be read in phenomenological and genealogical terms. A comparison between the first model of Hegelian recognition (re-actualized by Honneth and employed again by Ricœur) and the first movement of existence as outlined by Patočka (who develops a path within phenomenology similar to Ricœur's in many respects) as rooting movement, may prove helpful. In fact, the human individual must anchor herself and root herself in the world, and this is possible only through the intermediation of others:

The only chance of gaining the world, of anchoring oneself and taking root in it, depends on the others – this empirical fact, that is the powerlessness which originally pertains to childhood, is not a *merely* raw fact, but is rather linked to the essential rule according to which the human being does not come to existence in the form of a finished sum of reactions given by instinct; on the contrary, he must indeed *conquer* his own world, which can happen though only whether he is safe in the shelter that the other people assure. In the others thus becomes the earth warm, cozy and pleasant; our original home finds place in them, which is not a simply external need, but rather the same ground of the existence, the relation which bonds us to what in the world is *already* prepared for us, to what accepts us and must be already here before us, if we want to be capable of living and of performing all the other movements of life. (Patočka 2009: 197–198, my translation)

If we were to interpret Patočka's statement in a "literary-humanistic" way, we would misunderstand it entirely: it is a phenomenology, because he is targeting the structures of experience, the conditions for the emergence of selfhood, to use Ricœur's terminology. In this perspective, Patočka observes that "man is from the start of life immersed, rooted, primarily in the other. This rootedness in the other mediates all our other relations. The other is primordially he who looks after our *needs* before we can and do begin to look after them with him" (Patočka 1989: 260). And he points to the mother-child relationship as "the primordial starting point" (Patočka 1989: 259), in which a unique, incomparable relationship of compenetration is achieved, in which all further interpersonal relations have their origin. In this primordial contact with the other, "we encounter ourselves, for the first time, in promise, seeing and experiencing ourselves in his reactions, in his comportment toward us" (Patočka 1989: 258). Thus, otherness is at the heart of the becoming-self of each one of us. Care, the gaze, the recognition of the other – which we receive from the other – are the conditions for our rooting in the world and our achievement of selfhood.

Now, certainly within the primordial mother-child dyad there is reciprocity, an “*intersecting* dialectic of oneself and the other” as Ricœur would say, and not merely a movement of the Other towards the Same. The range of feelings, responses and affectionate behaviors at the mother’s disposal is always influenced by the inclinations, personality and responses of the child, in a circular process. Think of the interplay of reciprocally influencing replies that occurs already at the end of the child’s second month of life, in gazes and smiles. So that a mother-child relationship can be considered successful according to the satisfaction it gives to both the mother and the child. It amounts to the search and discovery of the other and of oneself in the other, and in it each of the two “parts” possesses itself in the other. However, we cannot ignore the fact that, during the first months of his life, the child is a passive receptor, so to speak, to the point that the problems and difficulties in the mother’s personalities pour out on him and manifest themselves in him, to the point of pathological suffering. The mother’s recognition can be inadequate or insufficient and, there is always even the possibility that it actually disappears, as in lack of absence of affection: in short, a child can be abandoned, with drastic consequences at every level of the development of its personality. As for the child, its only asset is the initial powerlessness that characterizes it as an individual belonging to the human species, in the unconscious form of a demand for recognition and care.

Thus, in the primordial relationship, as in every relationship, there is an exchange, a communication, a dialogue, but an originally asymmetrical one: the asymmetry of being called upon, of being called to reply to and by the gaze of another, because the possibility of survival and especially the “human” development of the child depends on the initiative of the mother – or of the one acting in her stead. So the vocation to selfhood which characterizes the child originally, could harden to the point of being blocked unless it is provoked and sustained by the other in a loving recognition. It is revealed and kept alive by the affectionate initiative of the other. The other calls me to *ipse*-identity, through the welcoming care that is offered in advance of my response: thus, the possibility of selfhood, of its becoming real, is inscribed within an “asymmetrical dialogic structure”, to quote Ricœur as he recalls – without subscribing to it – Lévinas’s position. Let us read the passage as a whole:

It is in me that the movement coming from the other completes its trajectory: the other constitutes me as responsible, that is, as capable of responding. In this way, the word of the other comes to be placed at the origin of my acts. Self-imputation, the central theme of the preceding three studies, is now inscribed within an asymmetrical dialogic structure whose origin lies outside me (Ricœur 1992: 336).

Aside from an exegesis of Lévinas, this expression now appears to be an exemplary summary of what I have just argued: if self-accusation, self-designation, self-affection are essential markers of selfhood, then its emergence depends on the initiative of the other, who meets and evokes that original “aptitude for being-affected”, Ricœur 1992: 354), or openness to the other, that could help define the structure of the human being. So in my perspective, starting from the selfhood-otherness dialectic, another dialectic appears, that between asymmetry and reciprocity. In fact, if we question the constitution of selfhood, or the appearance of the difference between

selfhood and sameness, from a genealogical perspective, we find an “asymmetrical dialogue-structure” as its necessary condition: to put it briefly, without acceptance and welcoming on the part of the other, no self, no selfhood emerges. But this original asymmetry belongs to a relationship, that is, it characterizes a dialogue-structure in which two poles are always at play, and in this sense it implies and requires reciprocity.

The genealogy of selfhood I have briefly outlined starting from Ricœur’s hermeneutics of self should have justified my choice of the second figure of otherness: in fact, one could not otherwise account for the constitution of “one’s own body”, or “flesh”. As Ricœur himself mentions in a footnote, borrowing a passage from Didier Frank: “the flesh in danger of fragmentation needs the help of the other for its identification” (Ricœur 1992: 332, f. 38). And, this is also true for the constitution of conscience (*Gewissen*), understood as “the voice of the Other” (Ricœur 1992: 339), but that is an allusion that must be saved for another discourse.

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The World of the Text and the World of Life: Two Contradictory Paradigms?

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Keywords Text • Metaphor • Meaning • Reading • Lifeworld

This reflection is situated under the sign of two quotations which, though they might appear to be very distant from one another, actually point toward the same problem. The first quotation is never discussed by Ricoeur, to my knowledge, even though he was certainly familiar with it. This is the passage from the introduction to *Being and Time* where Heidegger raises the question concerning the point of departure of a phenomenological ontology and defines this starting point by granting *Dasein* a privilege with regard to the question of being. Heidegger asks “in which being can the meaning of being be read [*An welchem Seienden soll der Sinn von Sein abgelesen werden*]?” (Heidegger 1996: §2) Although Heidegger does not make the point explicit, his use of the metaphor of reading suggests that what is “sought” [*Erfragte*] is a meaning (the meaning of being) and that, therefore, what is asked about [*Befragte*] can be compared to a text. This metaphor displays the relationship between ontology, phenomenology and hermeneutics that is established in the opening paragraphs of *Being and Time*, precisely where Heidegger presents the methodological specifications of his investigation. For him, it is a question of showing that a hermeneutics in the narrow sense of a method of reading and interpreting texts can only exist because there is a hermeneutics in the broad sense of the term, which thematizes “understanding” as an ontological dimension, an existential, of *Dasein*. As a result, to say that *Dasein* is similar to a text through which the meaning of being can be deciphered would entail a renewed interrogation of the definition of the word “text”. There are not only, nor first and foremost, texts in the world that would exist as cultural objects encountered in experience. To the contrary, textuality should be understood as a characteristic of being-in-the-world itself. This is, as I will try to show, also a thesis that Paul Ricoeur will defend but by following another route.

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The second quotation is one that is frequently mentioned by Ricoeur and that comes from Marcel Proust's *Time Regained*:

But to return to my own case, I thought more modestly of my book, and it would be inaccurate to say that I thought of those who would read it as 'my' readers. For it seemed to me that they would not be 'my' readers but the readers of their own selves, my book being merely a sort of magnifying glass like those which the optician of Combray used to offer his customers – it would be my book, but with its help I would furnish them with the means of reading what lay inside themselves.¹

Contrary to what is suggested by Heidegger, the "book" that is mentioned here is a worldly being, even though Proust refers here to an imaginary reader. It is up to the writer to provide the tools for readers to "read into themselves", as if the act of reading involved a deciphering of the self (or of oneself). It would not be incorrect to connect this with the operation described by Heidegger. Ricoeur is interested in this passage, precisely because it sheds light on the fact that reading is not only the interpretation of an objective meaning but also a central element of the understanding of the self. It is important not to misinterpret this understanding merely as the subject's appropriation of a meaning which would be initially foreign. Reading proceeds first from a distanciation that Ricoeur will thematize as an experience of the separation between the self and ego, or rather, between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity.

I would like to show that reading can be adopted as a good paradigm for a hermeneutic phenomenology, because it is an operation through which: 1) the subject is affected by a meaning from which it cannot be indemnified; 2) the referent of this meaning is the world of phenomena. It is not the text in the world, but the world of the text that affects the reader. Without that, Ricoeur could have practiced a hermeneutic but not a hermeneutic phenomenology. It is thus necessary to conceive a mediation through which the world of the text opens on to the lifeworld (taken, for now, as the world of perception), and at the same time conversely, through which the lifeworld can be known by an experience of textuality. The striking absence of a phenomenology of perception in Ricoeur will then become explicable by his refusal to carry out a direct description of the powers (for example, the powers of the body) that define the human relation to the world. Yet Ricoeur, unlike Heidegger, does not leave out the role of sense perception in his analysis of understanding. If reading can be a good point of entrance into the question of the lifeworld, this is because perception cannot be described in any other way than through the relation that the subject has with the meanings that surround it.

Here we are touching on a crucial point that a hermeneutical phenomenology cannot avoid. The rapprochement between the world of the text and the lifeworld inevitably gives rise to the charge of linguistic Idealism.² Some of Ricoeur's claims,

¹ This passage is discussed extensively in (Ricoeur 2013: 33).

² Following Anscombe, Claude Romano defines linguistic idealism by the thesis that "experience does not have any thread of intelligibility outside of its structure in language". See (Romano 2010: 878).

moreover, clearly do point in this direction, like the following definition taken from *Time and Narrative I*: “the world is the whole set of references opened by every sort of descriptive or poetic text that I have read, interpreted, and loved” (Ricoeur 1984: 80). Even if the text can be opened to a set of references and multiple styles, it seems to absorb the whole world, even without deciding which texture (language or the sensible) is at stake. In addition, there is the fact that Ricoeur gradually abandons the theme of the lifeworld as the concept of the “world of the work” comes to merge with the referential world. In reading some of Ricoeur’s statements, one would be tempted to say that the world refers to everything that can be read or, worse yet, everything that has *already* actually been said in ordinary language, stories, or literary works.

Yet, what puts such an interpretation into perspective, and in my opinion invalidates it, is precisely Ricoeur’s increasingly sustained attention to the phenomenon of reading (or rather, to reading as an act of phenomenization). It would only be a linguistic idealism if reading were understood as an act of deciphering applied to a world which, as a result, would be similar to a book. This book, moreover, would have to be understood on the basis of the model of a mundane cultural object that is open to multiple interpretations. For, Ricoeur never understands reading as one activity among others for an interpreting consciousness, instead it is a prime example of perception. The world of the text does not take the place of the lifeworld, but the *clash* between the world of the text and that of the reader produces a new type of reference which implies new perceptions. One might ask, then, why the world of the text should be favored over the lifeworld, if the former carries out the same function as the latter, namely, that of helping us to perceive the unexpressed and to arrive at the ownmost, but often hidden, possibilities of the subject. This chapter will try to show that this recourse to the world of the text has a critical purpose. Ricoeur clearly sets himself apart from some phenomenological or quasi-phenomenological uses of the concept of “life” that seek to overdetermine this concept in the systematic role assigned to the lifeworld.

This study will proceed in three stages. I will first recall the main features of what might be called, without fear of paradox, a poetics of perception. In *The Rule of Metaphor*, well before even introducing the concept of the “world of the text”, Ricoeur offers an entirely original theory about the access to the lifeworld that is not based on intuition. Second, I will try to show to what extent the “world of the text” is a phenomenological category in its own right, even though its source is located in a hermeneutic type of reflection. It is on this level that the reproach of linguistic idealism will be evaluated. Finally, I will examine the reverberations of this theme on a phenomenology of the lifeworld that can no longer be understood as a plea for the ineffable. The detour through the world of the text has the goal of protecting the description of the lifeworld against any relapse into vitalist ontology.

The Poem as *Epoché*

In a text devoted to the Husserlian “lifeworld” that was written in honor of Emmanuel Levinas (Ricoeur 1980), Ricoeur stresses the tension between the ontological priority of the *Lebenswelt* and the need to reach it by a “questioning back” [*Rückfrage*]. Ontologically, the lifeworld is originary, but epistemologically it can only be reached by lifting the idealizations and the objectifications produced by scientific activity. If the lifeworld refers to the unquestioned ground of all predication, we do not have any direct intuition of it. As such, the hermeneutic detour results from a *descriptive necessity* since the phenomenon in question (here, the “lifeworld”) contains none of the characteristics of intuitive evidence. If it is necessary to interpret in order to describe better, this is because the lifeworld is only accessible by the suspension of the scientific and cultural sediments that structure the expectations guiding our perception of what surrounds us.

For Ricoeur, it is thus a question of delaying as long as possible the fulfillment of description in ontology. The critical function of hermeneutics consists precisely in this desire to substitute an inquiry about meaning in place of a direct thematization of being. With respect to the lifeworld, the hermeneutic presupposition of phenomenology is verified:

The return to the *Lebenswelt* can more effectively play this paradigmatic role for hermeneutics if the *Lebenswelt* is not confused with some sort of ineffable immediacy and is not identified with the vital and emotional envelope of human experience, but rather is construed as designating the reservoir of meaning, the surplus of sense in living experience, which renders the objectifying and explanatory attitude possible (Ricoeur 1991: 43).

Phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches are only able to correct each other to the extent that they share the same goal, namely, that of performing a “step back” from the objectifications and explanations of science. But the specific benefit of hermeneutics is that it does not abandon the original to the ineffable, which would deprive it of its experiential character. Therefore, against the temptation of intuitive immediacy that continually resurfaces in any descriptive enterprise, it is necessary for what is fundamental to be always already articulated in a language.

Ricoeur specifies that this language is poetic discourse, which explains the role assigned, in the 1970s, to metaphor in providing access to the lifeworld. The whole purpose of *The Rule of Metaphor* is to demonstrate that metaphor, as a trope of semantic impertinence, is committed not only to investigating meaning but also to redesigning the theory of reference. The poetic gap produced by the transport of a term to a register that is foreign to it produces semantic effects at the same time as it questions the lexical code. These effects have an impact on the perception of the things themselves; through the metaphorical operation, they become redefined as the perception of the “similar”.

There is indeed a “metaphorical modality of the copula itself” (Ricoeur 1978: 293).³ The metaphorical process affects this copula in its existential function and

³Here I repeat in an abbreviated manner the analysis developed in Foessel 2004.

not only in its predicative function. For example, to say that ageing is “like” the evening is both to say what it is not and to redescribe what it is, in a permanent tension between the literal and the figurative meaning. Considered on the level of the sentence rather than the word, metaphor introduces ambiguity into the heart of ontology. Ricoeur thus forges the audacious notion of “metaphorical truth” inasmuch as it is irreducible precisely to formal logic as well as scientific objectivity: “Poetic discourse, we said, is that in which the *epoché* of ordinary reference is the negative condition allowing a second-order reference to unfold” (Ricoeur 1978: 360). The allusion to Husserl’s process of eidetic knowledge is clear, as well as its subversion in the direction of a hermeneutic phenomenology. In fact, it is not the seeing of essences that opens up metaphor but rather a “seeing as” that calls for interpretation each time. What is the nature of this “seeing”? Since metaphor shakes established categories, it designates the emergence of the pre-predicative into language. We can have access to the theme of the lifeworld because it can be taken up by an analysis of poetic language: “Poetic discourse brings to language a pre-objective world in which we find ourselves already rooted, but in which we also project our innermost possibilities” (Ricoeur 1978: 361–362).⁴ By giving rise to the similar without identifying it with the same, metaphor is the main poetic tool that guarantees the readability of the world. It allows the reader to see phenomena as what they are not in the literal sense, but “as” what they signify in relation to each other. It is thus a trope where signification itself *integrates the realm of appearing*.⁵

One of the main theses of Ricoeurian hermeneutics is that the sign both withdraws from and also reverts to the world. Thus, what is lost on the side of representation is gained on the side of redescription, precisely because the vacillation of the notions of the object, reality and truth is the negative condition for a transformation of the everyday. This verifies the phenomenological anchoring of such questioning, since it is on the “ruins of the literal sense” that a “more radical power of reference to those aspects of our own being-in-the-world that cannot be talked about directly” becomes manifest (Ricoeur 1984: 80). For, does the world not appear through the ruin of an “environment” [*Umwelt*] of signs for the benefit of a “world” [*Welt*] of new meanings? Whether it concerns the phenomenological reduction *stricto sensu* (Husserl), anxiety (Heidegger) or the metaphorization of everyday life (Ricoeur), the world only appears as a proper phenomenon by the suspension of the relation to the object and of the type of evidence that is associated with it. Poetic language has a revelatory function: it indicates that the referent cannot be exhausted by “description”.

⁴The end of this quote clearly indicates the Heideggerian framework in which Ricoeur is still situated at this point in his philosophical journey. Even if “seeing as” is explained in Wittgensteinian terms, Ricoeur’s reflection takes place under the auspices of the duality between apophantic *logos* and hermeneutic *logos*. Ricoeur’s prudence on this point can be explained by the Heideggerian critique of metaphor as a vestige of the metaphysical (cf. Ricoeur 1978: 356–370).

⁵That is the limited meaning that Ricoeur assigns to categorical intuition: it is not the understanding of essences but the appearing of meaning as with poetic discourse. Clearly, this position is distinguished from Husserl’s (Cartesian) thesis that language would only be an “unproductive layer” that does “not at all change” meaning.

The World of the Text

Based on what has just been said about the referential function of poetic language, it can be concluded that there is no such thing as a world of signs that would be immanent to itself and intransitive. Ricoeur clearly notes that “language does not constitute a world for itself” precisely because its purpose is to open up new perceptions (Ricoeur 1984: 78). The repeated rejection of the “short route” of ontology does not justify any kind of nominalism, since nothing more than a formal coherence can be extracted from sentences. Yet, even though language is not a world, Ricoeur does introduce, after *The Rule of Metaphor*, the expression of “the world of the text” with regard to narratives. What are the reasons for introducing this expression? How should we understand the fact that narrative discourse, in contrast to poetic speech in general, calls for this notion?

The use of the concept of “the world of the text” can be explained first by the limits of the problem developed in *The Rule of Metaphor*:

[...] the miracle of a metaphorical reference leaves unanswered the question of whether it is language itself that refers, or the one who states it; and therefore the question arises of knowing under what conditions someone speaking metaphorically refers obliquely to the world (Ricoeur 2013: 16).

Even once established, the existence of a metaphorical reference does not decide the issue concerning its source: whether it comes from the intention of the author or the immanent power of the text. The first reason why we must speak about “the world of the text” is due to the need to de-psychologize the hermeneutical act. In this formulation, the notion of “the world” expresses the semantic autonomy of the text. Interpretation does not seek to reconstruct the subjective intentions of the author. More than reflecting the will of an author, the text refers to the result of a synthetic activity that assembles a speaker, a saying, a said, events and, ultimately, a world. For, the term “world” implies the idea of a subsistence which, though it does not exist on its own, also does not depend merely on the intentions of the writer. These intentions can explain the meaning of the text but not its reference. This is why the world of the text is more than the world narrated by the text (whether fictive or past): “what is communicated, in the final analysis, is, beyond the sense of a work, the world it projects and that constitutes its horizon” (Ricoeur 1984: 77).

We must insist on this image of the horizon which is the central feature of the world in phenomenology, and in particular, of the lifeworld. By saying that the text projects a horizon beyond its internal coherence, Ricoeur is opposed to the linguistic reduction of the instance of discourse to the immanence of a system of signs. Beyond structure, the text prepares for an event. This is not just the repetition of the thesis, which is constant in Ricoeur, according to which to speak is always to say something to someone about something. More radically, the theme of the horizon means that the experience narrated by the text has a contour that circumscribes and distinguishes it and “arises against a horizon of possibilities” (Ricoeur: 1984: 78). The enigma here resides in the parallel implied between the confrontation with the text and perception itself. How should we understand this rapprochement, which is

always implicit in Ricoeur, between textuality, interpretation and the experience of the world? To what type of sense experience (and to what conception of sensibility) does the encounter with the world of the text refer?

The answers to these questions can be found in the transition provided by Ricoeur between the “configuration” of events by the text and their “refiguration” in the act of reading. Looking more closely, this problem involves the three strata of “mimesis”: the pre-narrative structure of action (*mimesis I*), the configuration of time in the narrative (*mimesis II*) and its reconfiguration in the act of reading (*mimesis III*). I will first discuss the link between *mimesis II* and *mimesis III* in order to return to *mimesis I* at the end. In so doing, this will complete the response to the objection of linguistic idealism.

Similar to the sign, the “world of the text” points to two seemingly contradictory tendencies. First, there is a movement of exile outside the world of perception of facts by the organic unity of the narrative called “configuration”. Second, there is an increase by this same narrative of the ability to discover and transform reality (“refiguration”). As with metaphor, there is a world of the text, in its relative autonomy, because the literary narrative suspends the use of deictic terms. This marks the eclipse of ostensive reference. Regardless of its content, the “this” of the poetic text cannot be described in terms of the surrounding world. Is this to say that the world of the text is devoid of every sensible character and does not open on to any experience? This would be to forget that the plot (*mimesis II*) is only the negative condition of the refiguration of the world of the text. If language is not a completely separate world, the text can only become a “world” by being refigured in an experience that is no longer exclusively linguistic.

This refiguration takes place in the act of reading. Reading does not only open up access to the world of the text, but makes it appear in something that subverts and sometimes contradicts the physiognomy of the reader’s world. To account for this subversion, Ricoeur often uses the metaphor of play: “in the act of reading, the reader plays with the narrative constraints, brings about gaps, takes part in the combat between the novel and the anti-novel” (Ricoeur 1984: 77). The refiguration of temporal experience is only possible, at least for the literary text, because the narrative is characterized by its indeterminacy. The rules implemented in the plot are never laws to which the reader must bend without leaving any room to the reader’s own figurative activity. Up to this point, one might think that only the world to which the reader gains access is imaginary: the characters or events depicted by the plot are refigured by the act of reading. It is precisely this imaginary dimension which opens the door for the accusation of linguistic idealism since, according to Ricoeur, the imagination has a semantic function as well as a sensible faculty (see Ricoeur 1991: 168–187). “The subject perceives by imagining, he imagines by reading, he reads by interpreting”: this could be the hermeneutic formula that reduces the world, contradictorily, to the scale of a mundane text.

Such an interpretation is untenable, however. Indeed, it likens reading and interpretation by disregarding the event, and even the ‘shock’, that Ricoeur attributes to the act of reading. A patient analysis of the phenomenon of reading is carried out in a chapter of *Time and Narrative 3*, significantly titled “The World of the Text and

the World of the Reader". It is devoted to a problem that seems to be regional: What is the point of intersection between the time of fiction and the time of history? As usual, Ricoeur develops his analysis on several fronts (a criticism of the alternative between fictionalism and ontological realism; a questioning of the contrast between the chronological time of history and the psychological time of literary fiction; a description of the phenomenon of reading). Despite this apparent scattering of various topics, the meaning of this chapter is univocal. It describes the phenomenon of reading as the fulfillment of the reference of the text. In this regard, it is quite revealing that Ricoeur borrows most of his references and terminology from phenomenology. This is why he notes that "considered apart from reading, the world of the text remains a transcendence in immanence" (Ricoeur 1988: 158). The immanence referred to here is, so to speak "a-subjective". It is the immanence of the narrative whose plot seems to constitute a closed universe of meanings and events. But this chapter is designed to show that this autonomy is only apparent, because reading does not happen to the text in an external and contingent way. As Proust wanted, it is indeed the reader who "makes" the book since it can only open on to a world in and through the event of reading.

How should this event of reading be explained? In the final analysis, it is the reader who carries out reference to the extent that the reader himself helps to configure the work. There is an aftershock of refiguration on to configuration: to read is not just to interpret a text that is already made, but to restore its horizontal dimension. As already suggested, a text is characterized by its structural incompleteness and requires the imaginative activity of the reader. The "sequence of sentences" staged by the narrative calls for a composition in the world. The fundamental point is that this is not the work of the author, but the result of the act of reading. To illuminate this point, Ricoeur borrows Roman Ingarden and Wolfgang Iser's description of reading in terms of "protentions" and "fulfillments". Each sentence of the text points beyond itself by opening a perspective: there is thus an anticipation ("protention") by the reader as the sentences connect to each other. But, unlike what happens in the perception of an object, "the literary object does not intuitively "fulfill" these expectations; it can only modify them" (Ricoeur 1988: 168). The text only becomes a phenomenon during the act of reading, but the intentional form of this act turns it into a singular phenomenon. If it is indeed the case that the text itself does not offer any fulfillment, it can only become a 'world' through the continual modification of the reader's expectations. This series of modifications structures the characteristic type of event that takes place in reading.

To account for this essential mobility of the act of reading, Ricoeur employs the metaphor of the "traveller's point of view". The reader does not know the destination of this imaginary journey, but yet it is not defined by the plot that is immanent to the text. It is necessary, then, to interpret the course of reading phenomenologically: the expectations that are modified by the course of sentences provoke an exile from the reader's surrounding world, a way of removing its pragmatic dimension (Heidegger would have said "utilitarian"). This "strategy of defamiliarization" is especially at work in the contemporary novel (Ricoeur cites Joyce's *Ulysses*) where

the reader seems to have the task of configuring the work by his or her own means (see Ricoeur 1988: 168 ff.). There is an event in reading because, in addition to the intentional modifications from which it is woven, reading changes the reader's world through the suspension of the sedimented categories that usually govern it. Access to the lifeworld is made possible only by this confrontation between the world of the text and the world of the reader. This confrontation is never as intense as when it disorients the typical expectations of ordinary life. This is not (yet) interpretation, but indeed the lived experience of a permanent tension between pretensions and fulfillments. The event of reading reveals the indeterminacy of the world that ceases to be assimilated into a *cosmos*. Reading is an experience that exceeds the interpretation of meaning due to the conflicts that constantly re-emerge: first, within the work and second, through the antagonism between the schemas of ordinary perception and those that are constructed by the poetic imagination.

From the World to Life, and Back

From this description of the act of reading, I will retain, in conclusion, the notion of the "aesthetic gap" evoked by Ricoeur in the same chapter from *Time and Narrative* 3. Insufficient attention has been paid to this occurrence of the term "aesthetic" in a work that, on the whole, rarely uses it. For the very same reasons that Ricoeur refuses to address the issue of perception directly, he prefers to examine the powers of the productive imagination rather than following the direct path of an *aisthesis*. Yet, the preceding remarks show that the articulation between the world of the text and the lifeworld call quite naturally for a reflection on the morphology of sensible experience.

It is in the context of a discussion of the aesthetics of reception that a formula of Hans Robert Jauss appears. Ricoeur evokes Jauss's equation established between the meaning of a work and its reception, a thesis that fits perfectly with Ricoeur's own description of the phenomenon of reading. As we have seen, the reading of a literary text modifies, and sometimes contradicts, the reader's horizon of expectations. But what is this horizon made of, if not a system of references that have been established by earlier traditions and that the new work puts back into question? In other words, "the critical factor for establishing a literary history is the identification of successive *aesthetic differences* between the pre-existing horizon of expectation and the new work, distances that mark out the work's reception" (Ricoeur 1988: 172). The reception of a work has a history because it is made up of a series of events through which its meaning changes along with the context of its interpretation.

What is said here about literary history is rooted in the experience of reading. There can only be a "history of effects" because the main effect of reading is to modify the reader's horizon of expectations: "If a new work is able to create an aesthetic distance, it is because a prior distance exists between the whole of literary

life and everyday practice” (Ricoeur 1988: 173). As is well-known, Ricoeur identifies the refiguration in reading with what hermeneutics, specifically Gadamer’s hermeneutics, calls “application”. But, what exactly is it an application of? The literary work opens a horizon of expectations that is previously ignored by the reader: that is the meaning of aesthetic distance. The world accessed by the reader differs from the world in which the reader lives, which is made up of traditions that are often overlooked. Gadamer’s image of “the fusion of horizons” makes this perhaps too irenic, but Ricoeur takes this as a figure of the distance or conflict between different perceptual and symbolic universes. Ultimately, aesthetic pleasure helps us to understand the categories of everyday life at the same time as it subverts them. In this context, Ricoeur speaks of a “perceptive reception, attentive to the prescriptions of the musical score that the text is, one that opens up by virtue of the horizontal aspect that Husserl attributed to all perception” (Ricoeur 1988: 174). This intertwining, which is also expressed by the term “aesthetics”, connects perception and the imagination. In reading, there is indeed a transfiguration of daily life which is also an experience of the productive imagination.

Based on this notion of aesthetic distance, we can draw two main conclusions relating to our theme. The first is connected to *mimesis I*, which is to say the pre-narrative structure of action and experience that we have chosen to set aside up to this point. According to Ricoeur, a text would not be able to carry a world that enters into dialogue or opposition with the world of the reader, if the reader’s world were not already articulated in terms of norms, symbols, and sentences. It is a constant thesis of Ricoeur that life, *as life*, is “in search of narration” because it is always already articulated in fragments of stories, inhabited by characters, and invested with an imaginary. Inasmuch as *mimesis I* expresses this entanglement of the symbolic and the existential, one could be tempted to see it as additional proof of the linguistic idealism for which hermeneutic phenomenology is often criticized. And it is correct that Ricoeur does not distinguish perception from interpretation, because the symbolic, in a general sense, is the *medium* through which it becomes possible to reconstitute the physiognomy of experience. But from the fact that life is invested by language, can we conclude that it is only language? This does not seem to be the case. And, if one absolutely wants to keep the term idealism, then it would be necessary to speak of a transcendental idealism (in a Kantian sense). Ricoeur’s thesis is not that language (in any form whatsoever) constitutes life, but that life is accessible only through the mediation of the languages in which it has always sought to be expressed. In other words, the subject does not live in a universe of signs (nothing of this sort exists), even if, as the phenomenon of reading attests, the structures of one’s dwelling in the world are revealed thanks to poetic experiences. As such, a “text” interests the subject as the reader of him or herself, not because it would contain a metaphysical lesson about the self or the world, but because there is no immediate access to the reality of life. To be sure, the reality of life is not made up

of stories, but it is not accessible in any direct intuitive experience; it thus loses the appearance of immediacy that all forms of philosophical vitalism give to it.⁶

Second, this insistence on symbolic mediation produces a rebound effect on the way that phenomenology thematizes the lifeworld. Ricoeur's reworking of a phenomenology of perception on a poetic basis attests that the aim of the world is the aim of a horizon in which we can *act*. This insistence on the practical dimension of being in the world proceeds from a neutralization of what is potentially ontologizing in the notion of "life". In Ricoeur's final developments of the concept of the world, we can see a shift of emphasis from the theoretical sphere to the ethical sphere: the horizon opened by reading is constituted by practical possibilities, first and foremost. The uncovering of the multiple semantic dimensions of the text turns out to be correlative to a "proposition about the world" which implies that what is sought by the text can also be sought by the reader. This is not simply to say that the lifeworld is a world "to be made" (which already implies that it is not "given"), but much more boldly, it elevates the reconfiguring imagination to the rank of an essential component of the faculty of action.

If narrative is a category of action, this is because reading is "a thought experiment by which we are to inhabit worlds foreign to ourselves" (Ricoeur 2004: 447). This experience of alterity "becomes a provocation to act and to be otherwise" to the extent that it forces the reader to put into perspective his or her allegiances to his or her own world. Imaginative variations operate here directly on the "I can", which is the primary category of a phenomenology of the capable human. This insistence on the practical dimension of imaginative experience is directly related to the form of the horizon and thus to the incompleteness that is characteristic of the world. The "lifeworld" ceases to be a refuge for the ineffable and the given, because the world's mode of appearing is structured by the imagination and thus takes away life's dimensions of radical immanence and self-sufficiency. The paradigm of reading, by rejecting a direct ontology of ourselves, maintains a healthy critical distance between the worlds that the subject imagines and the life that is given to the subject with the appearance of a destiny.

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⁶The end of *Memory, History, Forgetting* expresses perfectly life's independence from narrative (here, it is historical narrative) as well as the need to postpone every immediate perception of life: "Under history, memory and forgetting. Under memory and forgetting, life. But writing a life is another story. Incompletion." (Ricoeur 2004: 506).

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Part III
**Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Tradition,
Memory and History**

Word, Writing, Tradition

Michael Sohn

Abstract Paul Ricœur's understanding of tradition is usually associated with his intervention in the Gadamer-Habermas debate in an important work entitled "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" (1973). This chapter focuses on his earlier writings on tradition, specifically his critical engagement with French structuralism and philosophy of language during the 1960s through the early 1970s, which inform his later more well-known reflections. Instead of pursuing the now familiar themes of critique and ideology, distanciation and belonging, then, the themes of word or speech [*parole*] and writing [*écriture*] will be examined. I argue that Ricœur offers a critique of a dead and static notion of tradition, conceived as an abstract, fixed structure and meaningless deposit. And he presents a constructive alternative for a living and dynamic sense of tradition, which is first an eventful address of speech to a listening individual or community and which is meaningfully mediated by writing through the phenomenon of the 'written voice' and the 'listening reader'. By attending to and parsing the meanings of *parole* and *écriture*, this chapter unfolds a philosophically rigorous and linguistically informed concept of tradition that is, at once, conservative and innovative.

Keywords Hermeneutics • Language • Tradition • Event • Meaning

Introduction

Paul Ricœur's understanding of tradition is usually and unsurprisingly associated with his work on Hans-Georg Gadamer (Grondin 2003; Frey 2008; Mootz III and Taylor 2011; Vallée 2013), that great contemporary philosopher of tradition with whom he was personally acquainted early in his career and for whom he held great admiration throughout it.¹ Perhaps most well-known for his intervention in the Gadamer-Habermas debate in a work entitled, "Hermeneutics and the Critique

¹Ricœur and Gadamer first met in Louvain, Belgium in November 1957 when Gadamer was invited to give a talk on the problem of historical consciousness (Dosse 1997: 395).

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of Ideology” (Ricœur 1973a), Ricœur indeed worked to disseminate Gadamer’s thought in France, most notably by overseeing the French translation of *Wahrheit und Methode*.² When a complete translation was finally published in 1996 with Éditions du Seuil, he honored him with an extended review, calling it “the fundamental book in contemporary hermeneutics....without a doubt the most important published in Germany since Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*” (Ricœur 1996). Despite his early acquaintance with him and his later public appreciation of his works, in fact, Ricœur did not write explicitly on Gadamer’s now influential understanding of tradition until 1971.³ His interest in the concept of tradition, however, goes beyond his encounter with Gadamer. It can be traced back, implicitly, to his early works in the 1930s in his critique of reflexive philosophies and through the 1940s and 1950s in his considerations of the existential and historical conditions of the philosopher,⁴ and, later explicitly, in the 1960s, after the publications of *L’homme faillible* and *La symbolique du mal* and his subsequent turn to the problem of language.⁵ This chapter focuses specifically on his critical engagement with French structuralism and philosophy of language during the 1960s through the early 1970s, which inform his later more well-known reflections. While Gadamer’s critics often charge that his account of tradition does not adequately allow for social critique, Ricœur’s reading of Gadamer makes clear that he wishes to defend tradition not only as a repository of the past, but also as a condition for social change and innovation. The origins and development of this understanding of tradition can be traced to this earlier period in his reflections on the nature of language.

This chapter proposes both a historical and constructive study of Ricœur’s concept of tradition: it is interested in more than simply historically situating his concept within the overall corpus of his works and the thinkers and intellectual movements of the period, but additionally seeks to re-raise questions regarding the nature and understanding of tradition itself.⁶ Instead of pursuing the themes of critique and ideology, distanciation and belonging, which are now well-known due to many excellent studies of Ricœur’s later critical engagement with Gadamer,

²Indeed, their correspondence from February 1964 through October 2000 largely centered on the translation of *Wahrheit und Methode* (Grondin 2013).

³The early 1970s, for Ricœur, marked a turn to Gadamer’s works. In 1971, Ricœur offered a seminar devoted to Gadamer’s *Wahrheit und Methode* (Ricœur 1971d), and in 1972–1973, he conducted a seminar entitled “Herméneutique et critique des ideologies,” which would be the basis for his now well-known article on Gadamer and Habermas (Ricœur 1973b, 1981a). To my knowledge, the first time he cites Gadamer is in two articles, which were published in 1971 (Ricœur 1971a, c).

⁴For a discussion of Ricœur’s earliest works as a student in the 1930s, see Vallée (2012); Sohn (2013).

⁵Ricœur recalls that “Nineteen sixty-one was the year when...I felt compelled to shift my interest from the original problem of the structure of the will to the problem of language as such, which had remained even at the time when I was studying the strange structures of the symbolism of myths” (Ricœur 1971b: 14, 15).

⁶Ricœur’s later discussions of Gadamer do touch upon the issues of speech [*Sprachlichkeit*] and writing [*Schriftlichkeit*] (Ricœur 1991b: 73), but they recede into the background in comparison to the more dominant themes of critique and ideology, distanciation and belonging.

the themes of word or speech [*parole*] and writing [*écriture*] will be highlighted.⁷ By attending to and parsing the meanings of *parole* and *écriture*, this chapter unfolds a philosophically rigorous and linguistically informed understanding of tradition that is, at once, conservative and innovative. Tradition, on Ricœur's account, is constituted by the priority of *parole* – an eventful address of speech to a listening individual or community – and mediated by *écriture* – the paradigmatic locus for the manifestation of meaning. The course of this chapter, then, works progressively through the historical development of his notion of tradition during the 1960s through the early 1970s and unfolds his conceptual understanding of tradition through *parole* and *écriture*. I conclude by working regressively in the movement from *écriture* to *parole* so as to delineate both the extent and limits of that particular understanding of tradition in relation to human existence.

The Priority of the Word [Parole]

The Linguistic Priority of the Word

Ricœur first extensively wrote on tradition at a colloquium, entitled “Ermeneutica e tradizione,” which was organized by Enrico Castelli in 1963. The theme was so appropriate that he offered his presentation reflecting precisely on the relationship between tradition and interpretation. He states in his opening lines:

[Tradition] even understood as the transmission of a *depositum*, remains a dead tradition if it is not the continual interpretation of this deposit: our ‘heritage’ is not a sealed package we pass from hand to hand, without ever opening, but rather a treasure from which we draw by the handful and which by this very act is replenished lives by the grace of interpretation, and it is at this price that it continues, that is, remains living (Ricœur 1974c: 31).

Ricœur clearly distinguishes between a sealed, dead tradition that is merely a fixed and static deposit in contradistinction to an open, living tradition that is renewed through the act of interpretation. Tradition and interpretation are linked, for Ricœur, through meaning [*le sens*]; if tradition is to remain living, it must have meaning. And meaning involves “both a sedimentation in a deposit and a clarification in an interpretation” (Ricœur 1974c: 31), a transmission of the tradition as well as a renewal of it. Rather than simply asserting tradition as a conservative and innovative force, he sought to rigorously conceptualize it through his engagement with structuralism.

His presentation, entitled “Symbolique et temporalité” and later reprinted and published as “Structure et herméneutique” (Ricœur 1974c), never cites Gadamer, and rather, it is Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *La pensée sauvage*, which was released in 1962 one year prior, that is the basis of his reflections on tradition. I will focus primarily on “Symbolique et temporalité” supplemented by another article from

⁷The French term *parole* can be translated as ‘word’ or ‘speech’ and *écriture* can be translated as ‘writing’ or ‘scripture’. Context will dictate the English translation.

that period entitled “Le symbolisme et l’explication structurale” (Ricœur 1964), which together indicate his first explicit reflections on tradition through his engagement with Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism. To that end, I want to isolate two key points from structural linguistics, formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure, which inform Lévi-Strauss’s work and relate to Ricœur’s concept of tradition.

First, Ricœur highlights Saussure’s now well-known distinction between *parole* and *langue* (Ricœur 1964: 83–84). Saussure’s drive to a science of language privileges *langue* as the object of study for linguistics – a closed system of signs that refers to the social institution and rules of the game of language that function by themselves. The relationship between signifier and signified is an inner distinction within the sign itself without reference to things outside the system, akin to a dictionary. The experience of language, however, reveals a resistance to systematize and absolutize language as an object for empirical science.⁸ What is neglected by an undue emphasis on *langue*, according to Ricœur, is the act of speaking itself. As he puts it succinctly, “language [*la langue*] says nothing” (Ricœur 1968: 10). *Parole*, on the other hand, refers to the individual performance of language, involving a subject who speaks to someone about something. *Parole*, then, is a deeper and more concrete dimension of linguistic analysis than *langue*. The word [*le mot*] is no longer simply a difference in a dictionary, but a moment in an act of *parole* – the word takes life. Whereas Saussure’s drive to a science of language privileges an explanation of the structure of *langue*, Ricœur’s existential phenomenology privileges an interpretation of the concrete dimension of language as *parole* (Ricœur 1964: 84). The connection between language and *parole* is important, for if we are to speak of the linguistic character of living tradition it is one that must *speak* and address someone in the concrete and not be reduced to a fixed structure or abstract system.

The privileging of *parole* over *langue* by Ricœur correlates to the privileging of event over structure. As he states: “The ‘word’ [*parole*] aspect is therefore the exercise of language by each of us at every moment, and in this we can say that the word is always an *event*. Someone stands up and speaks: it is an event” (Ricœur 1964: 83–84). The fleeting, temporal event-character of *parole* is employed to serve as a contrast to the fixed, non-temporal structure of *langue*. Tradition, then, is conceived as eventful *parole*, and not as fixed structure of *langue*, which indicates his insistence on the interruptive and innovative dimensions within tradition. *Parole*, however, cannot remain as a fleeting rupture, but must persist as an event with meaning. Ricœur writes:

A hermeneutic that is built on the sole category of the event of the word [*parole*] lacks the fundamental dialectic of event and meaning [*sens*]. At the same time, such a hermeneutic is unable to understand the irreducible character of the sequence: speech-writing-speech [*parole-écriture-parole*] (Ricœur 1971a: 24).

⁸For instance, Ricœur writes, “That language is an object goes without saying, so long as we maintain the critical awareness that this object is entirely defined by the procedures, methods, presuppositions, and finally the structure of the theory, which governs its constitution. But if we lose sight of this subordination of object to method and to theory, we take for an absolute what is only a phenomenon” (Ricœur 1974b).

Ricœur will introduce the notion of discourse as a way to mediate the dialectic of event and meaning. While discourse shares the eventful characteristics of *parole*, the inclusion of meaning shifts the interest towards *écriture*. We will see in the next section that although meaning in discourse occurs in *parole* or speech, it is paradigmatically achieved in *écriture* or writing.

The second important aspect regarding Ricœur's critical engagement with structuralism is the privileging of synchrony within Saussure's linguistic system (Ricœur 1974c: 29–30). Synchronic linguistics, as the term suggests, refers to a science of the state of the system; diachronic linguistics refers to a science of its changes and transformations. What Ricœur rejects is not the opposition between synchrony and diachrony, but rather the subordination of the latter to the former such that diachrony is a mere disturbance without significant change to the system. The result of privileging synchrony is a neglect of the historical dimension of language, not only from one linguistic system to another, but in the very production of culture and language. For Ricœur, the continuity of the structure of language and rules of grammar permit mutability in the meaning of the sign. The connection between language and diachrony is important, for the linguistic character of tradition means that it must not be a static closed system of signs, but dynamic and open to semantic innovation. In other words, an understanding of tradition is not through semiology and the decoded explanation of signs, but through semantics and the interpretation of ever changing meanings.

Drawing from the insights and oversights of structuralism, Ricœur tries to mediate an understanding of language between structure and event, between system and existence. On the one hand, structure without event fails to account for concrete, existential meaning. The eventful character of language underlines that it is realized temporally, as opposed to the structural character of language that lies outside of the flux of time. Moreover, the event consists in the fact that someone speaks to someone; it is an address. On the other hand, event without structure passes away without meaning. Just as language surpasses itself as system and realizes itself as event, so too language by entering the process of understanding, surpasses itself as event and becomes meaning. It is within the dialectic of structure and event, between the poles of a fixed, abstract system and a concrete rupture where concrete, existential meaning and semantic innovation occurs (Ricœur 1974c: 30).

In rising from system to event, in the instance of discourse, it brings structure to the act of speech [*parole*]. In returning from the event to the system, it brings to the system the contingency and disequilibrium without which it could neither change nor endure; in short, it gives a 'tradition' to the structure, which in itself is outside of time (Ricœur 1974b: 95).

Tradition, then, can be understood as both the movement from system to event that brings structure to *parole* as well as the movement from event to system that provides interruption and innovation. Tradition without events would be reduced to a meaningless, abstract, static structure, and tradition without structure would be simply a concatenation of fleeting events. It is only through the integration of event and structure that tradition is constituted by both a deposit of sedimentation and interruptions and innovations.

The Ontological Priority of Listening to the Word

The method of structural linguistics, which examines phonological, lexical, and syntactical structures to explain a science of language, fails to consider concrete human existence and the use of language in everyday life. In the early 1960s, Ricœur critically responds to the limitations of structuralism by excavating and privileging the notion of *parole* over *langue*. By the mid-1960s, however, he would pursue the turn to the concrete in his philosophy of language by uncovering the notion that *parole* is not primordially speaking, but rather listening. It is during this period that he would turn from the structuralism of Saussure and Lévi-Strauss to the ontology of Martin Heidegger. In this section, I will focus on his notes and presentation that he gave at Duquesne University in 1966, entitled “Heidegger’s Conception of Language in Connection to Linguistics,” which explores a deeper, more primordial dimension of language than structural linguistics. The ontology of language, for Ricœur, is not a substitute for linguistics because linguistics is legitimate within the purview of its boundaries that it determines for itself. Rather, the ontology of language is a critique in the Kantian sense, a questioning at the level of its conditions of intelligibility. His turn to the ontology of language, then, is concerned about the mode of being which gives hermeneutical conditions for the empirical science of language.

Ricœur notes that Heidegger privileges saying [French: *dire*; German: *sagen*] over speaking [French: *parler*; German: *sprechen*]: “Saying is an original structure of *Dasein*; even a co-original structure on the same footing with dispositions [*Befindlichkeit*] and understanding. *Saying – die Rede* – is the specific articulation belonging to the understanding of Being-in-the-world” (Ricœur 1966: 17718). Insofar as saying [*dire*] is an original structure of *Dasein*, it is the ground of speaking [*parler*]. Saying designates the existential constitution of Being-in-the-world, while speaking is the mundane expression of saying that lapses into the empirical. Our primordial relation to language, then, is not speaking, but silence. “Silence,” Ricœur claims, “means that our first relation to language is to hear, to listen to” (Ricœur 1966: 17719). Elsewhere he puts it more succinctly: “listening before speaking” (Ricœur 1968: 12). In this sense, *parole* first comes to us, rather than proceeding from us. The ontological priority of listening to the word is significant, for our relation to language and tradition is not of a subject who mines an object or deposit, but rather one in which we are passive listeners. To relate to tradition in passive listening is to imply that we are necessarily, at least at first, obedient to it. As Ricœur duly notes: “It is not by chance that in many of the Western European languages, the words for ‘obedience’ are derived from the words for ‘hearing’ or ‘listening’. In Latin, for example, *obedientia* [obedience] is related to *obaudire* [to give ear, to listen]” (Ricœur 1969: 72). While obedience to tradition held a negative connotation during the age of modern Enlightenment and its motto to ‘dare to think for oneself’, as Kant famously put it, Ricœur retrieves a positive understanding that describes our fundamentally passive relation to it.

Ricœur’s efforts to unfold a concrete understanding of tradition lead him to affirm the priority of the word [*parole*]. Living tradition, he insists, is not a static or

fixed structure, but rather a concrete address that meaningfully ‘speaks’ to individuals and communities that primordially and necessarily listen. It is constituted by a sedimented deposit, interruptive events, and semantic innovations. Ricœur wishes to hold together the insights of his criticism of structural linguistics with the insights of the ontology of language. On the one hand, tradition without a sufficient appreciation of our ontological relation of belonging and obedience is descriptively inadequate and neglects tradition’s conservative dimension. On the other hand, tradition without adequate attention to the priority of *parole* and its eventful character neglects the interruptive and innovative dimensions within tradition. Only by affirming the priority of the word and by holding these two insights together is tradition properly understood as both conservative and innovative.

The Mediation of Writing [Écriture]:

Listening to the Word and Reading the Text⁹

The problem of meaning, which was first addressed by Ricœur in the privileging of *parole* over *langue* and central to his understanding of tradition, is pursued further in the early 1970s when he examines the relationship between *parole* and *écriture*. For how does meaning remain if *parole* is a fleeting and disappearing event? “It is not the fleeting event that we want to understand,” he insists, “but its lasting meaning” (Ricœur 1971c: 179). To show how *parole* passes from event to meaning, he does not return to *langue*, but rather to writing [*écriture*]. He writes, “what happens in writing is the full manifestation of what is a virtual state, nascent and inchoate in live speech [*parole*], namely the detachment of meaning in regard to the event” (Ricœur 1971c: 179). The meaning in *parole*, which is nascent and inchoate, is fragile and threatened by the passage of time. Writing thereby fixes, stabilizes, and stores meaning, which is otherwise fleeting in speech [*parole*] (Ricœur 1972a: 25). While the event of speech is transitory, the stability of meaning in writing is such that it can be identified and reidentified as the ‘same’ (Ricœur 1972a, b: 15).

⁹My chapter is devoted to Ricœur’s understanding of tradition through his engagement with philosophy of language, particularly around the notion of *parole* and *écriture* during the 1960s and early 1970s. It is noteworthy, however, that he also offered theological reflections later in his career precisely on the understanding and relationship between the Word of God [*Parole de Dieu*] and Holy Scripture [*Écriture sainte*]. On the one hand, he acknowledges the difference between profane words and writings and theological words and writings. He writes, “It appears to me, indeed, that a seemingly insurmountable gap is widening between, on the one hand, the use of the terms ‘*paroles*’ and ‘*écriture*’ in the profane context of ordinary language and, on the other hand, the use of the same terms adorned in capital letters that we encounter in dogmatic statements from high theology on the relationship between the Word of God [*Parole de Dieu*] and Holy Scripture [*Écritures saintes*].” On the other hand, the circular relation between word and writing where the word is the lexical unit of all writing while writing is the place for meaning of the word is re-articulated such that the Word is a ‘foundation’ for Scripture and yet Scripture is the place for the manifestation of the Word (Ricœur 1994: 307–308).

The fleeting medium of the voice, which appears and disappears, is replaced by the fixed medium of material marks.

The invention of writing, Ricœur avers, had significant implications with respect to the nature of communication. He alludes to how writing, for instance, enables communication across great distance far beyond the limits of face to face dialogue. It makes possible the inscription of numbers, which promotes merchant relations and the development of the economy, and it enables the promulgation of laws, which has important effects on political rule. The implications of the shift from speech to writing, however, are not limited to the sociology of communication.

One significant philosophical implication is the severing of the relationship between intention and meaning. In speech [*parole*], there is a unity to intention and meaning. “The subjective intention of the speaking subject and the meaning of speech overlap,” Ricœur notes, “so that it is the same thing to understand what the speaker means” (Ricœur 1971c: 181). What the speaker intends to say aligns with the meaning of the speech – or at least it can be clarified through the exchange of question and response in face to face dialogue. In writing [*écriture*], however, the intention of the author and the meaning of the text cease to coincide – and it cannot be clarified due to the absence of the author. As Ricœur puts it, “What the text says matters now more than what the author meant” (Ricœur 1971c: 181). In short, as Ricœur will later develop throughout the 1970s, there is what he calls the ‘semantic autonomy of the text’ due to the distance from and unavailability of authorial intention. With respect to the relationship between intention and meaning, then, Ricœur draws a strong distinction between speech and writing. “The writing-reading relation,” he notes, “is not a particular case of the speaking-hearing relation which we experience in the dialogical situation” (Ricœur 1981b: 165).

For all the sociological and philosophical differences between speech and writing, however, there are also important continuities in the two modes of communication. The relationship between speech and writing is parallel to listening and reading. *Parole* is, as we have seen, a concrete address, which is grounded in the primordiality of listening to a voice. *Écriture*, in similar fashion, ‘speaks’ to the reader in the form of a concrete address. Ricœur writes, “if by speech [*parole*] we understand, with Ferdinand de Saussure, the realization of language [*langue*] in an event of discourse, the production of an individual utterance by an individual speaker, then each text is in the same position as speech with respect to language” (Ricœur 1991c: 106). Whether it is the oral word or the written word, they are both *parole*, i.e. they speak. Later in his career, he would elaborate on this suggestion through the concept of the ‘written voice’, exemplified in the phenomenon of narrative voice:

There is no doubt with narrative texts where one can speak without abuse of a narrative voice to designate the narrator, distinct from the author, who gives us...a narration of the events that he reports. But this notion of narrative voice is perhaps only a particular case of what one might call the *written voice* that we recognize as the *unity of style* of a work...In general, to understand a work in its singularity is to participate in the dialectic of questions and responses included in the work itself. It is under this condition that one can say that the work speaks. It is not a vocal voice, so to speak, pushed outside of the body by the living breath; it is only the analogue of the voice in writing – a *written voice*. A voice without a

mouth or face or gesture, a voice without a body. And yet a voice that *questions* the reader and thus restores beyond the rupture that writing establishes between the author and the reader, the *equivalent* of the link that the living voice protects in the outline of speech. In this rare moment of fortunate reading, it becomes legitimate to say that reading is not to see, but to listen. This word [*parole*] somehow heard in *writing* [*écriture*] is the exact reply of this writing which lets one be surprised about the nascent state in every word expressed (Ricoeur 1989: 404–405).

By introducing the category of what he calls the ‘written voice,’ exemplified in the narrative voice, Ricoeur indicates the proximity and convergence between speech and writing even as he simultaneously wants to distance and distinguish authorial voice and intent from textual meaning. The retrieval of the notion of a voice within writing is important because a text, if it is to have meaning, must first speak to and address the ‘listening’ reader. As he states simply, “To read is to listen” (Ricoeur 1994: 310). By introducing the notion of a ‘unity of style,’ Ricoeur wants to insist on the singularity of the work, irreducible to the structures of language and systems of thought. Put differently, the task of understanding, then, is to de-cipher the meaning of the text, rather than to de-code the structure of its language. The text, like *parole*, is not a scientific object to be examined and analyzed, but rather it manifests and mediates meaning through interpretation and understanding. Thus, Ricoeur imports the insights of his critical engagement with structuralism and the privileging of *parole* over *langue* into his understanding of the text.

Before turning to the final section, I want to say a few words regarding the relationship between speech [*parole*] and writing [*écriture*]. Firstly, Ricoeur acknowledges the irreducible polarity between speech and writing. He writes, “On the one hand, we have the voice, a face, a gesture and the weight of the presence of the whole body. On the other hand, we have the support of external marks inscribed in space” (Ricoeur 1994: 308). While the speaker is present in speech, the writer is absent from the writing. While both speech and writing have interlocutors, there is a face to face dialogical relation in speech as opposed to the distance of space and time between the author and the unknown readers. Secondly, despite the irreducible differences between speech and writing, Ricoeur maintains that there is an equal dignity to both expressions of discourse. Even as speech holds historical and ontological priority, writing is not viewed as the ruin of speech. And, conversely, even as writing holds priority in the economic, political, and juridical realm, it is not to the denigration of speech. The equal dignity of speech and writing comes forth through their mutual relation: “We can speak in turn of an infiltration of writing in orality and of a promotion of orality in writing” (Ricoeur 1994: 309). On the one hand, orality already indicates a primitive distance between the saying [*dire*] and the said [*dit*], “a distance that seems to anticipate the absence of the writer to his writing” (Ricoeur 1994: 309). There is, in other words, a sense in which the distance between the writer and the writing is already implied in the distance between the word-event and meaning. On the other hand, the phenomenon of reading discloses a call to not only see, but also listen to the ‘written voice’ within the text, exemplified in the narrative voice – “the fictive entity which seems to speak to me when I read” (Ricoeur 1994: 310).

Tradition, if it is to be living and not dead, must have meaning. Even as tradition is first a concrete address of *parole* to which we have a primordial relation of passive listening and obedience, it is necessarily mediated by *écriture*, which is the paradigmatic locus of meaning. Ricœur wants to preserve the salient aspects of *parole* within *écriture*, indicated in his notion of the ‘written voice’ and the ‘listening reader,’ even as he shifts attention to the place of meaning within the text. On the one hand, the text must ‘speak’ in the form of an event to the ‘listening reader’ who interprets and reinterprets its meaning. And the reader does not treat the text as an object or deposit to be mined, but rather holds a primordial relation of listening to the ‘written voice’. Ricœur’s conception of tradition that insists on the mediation of writing, then, maintains both a fixation of meaning as well as openness to changing interpretations of it. Put differently, tradition mediates between sedimentation and innovation. Ricœur never makes explicit why ‘writing’ is used as the locus for meaning. Insofar as ‘writing’ is the paradigm for the stabilization and fixation of meaning, however, it is conceivable that his concept of tradition may extend to any transmission of meaning including, for example, oral traditions. Still the privileged use of ‘writing’ as the norm and paradigm for the constitution of tradition remains problematic and may belie his own presuppositions in formulating the concept.¹⁰

Writing and Tradition¹¹

If tradition is necessarily mediated by writing insofar as it is the locus and manifestation of meaning, conversely, writing is necessarily mediated by tradition. As there is a mutual relation and equal dignity between speech and writing, so, too, there is

¹⁰As noted above, *écriture* can be translated as ‘writing’ or ‘scripture’. In other places, Ricœur examines the relationship between the Word of God [*Parole de Dieu*] and Scripture [*Écriture*], which inform his interest in and understanding of *parole* and *écriture*.

¹¹My chapter is devoted to Ricœur’s understanding of tradition through his engagement with philosophy of language, particularly during the 1960s and early 1970s. It is noteworthy, however, that during this same period, he was also reading and writing on Gerhard von Rad’s *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions*. It was first published in 1957 in the original German, but Ricœur’s copy in his personal library seems to indicate that he read the English translation that was published in 1962, the same year that Lévi-Strauss’s *La pensée sauvage* was released. For the note that Ricœur was reading von Rad’s *Old Testament Theology* at the same time as Lévi-Strauss’s *La pensée sauvage*, see Ricœur (1974c: 45). What Ricœur finds significant in von Rad’s work is that it “suggests an inverse relationship between diachrony and synchrony and raises more urgently the problem of the relationship between structural comprehension and hermeneutic comprehension.” The Old Testament is understood by von Rad not as nomenclature or classification of the religion of Israel in the abstract, but of founding historical events. To submit the content of the Old Testament to an ordered schema of doctrines (eg doctrine of God, doctrine of man) is inadequate to a faith that is tied to divine acts of salvation within history. It is the surplus of meaning in founding events that motivates the formation of tradition and interpretation. The task of biblical criticism, then, is not a reconstruction of actual historical events behind the major source documents; rather one must understand that each seemingly simple narrative unit is, in fact, the final stage of a long process of transmission and interpretation of varied traditions.

a mutual relation and equal dignity between writing and tradition. And the dialectic of sedimentation and innovation in tradition through speech extends to writing, for any piece of writing is composed by an individual author, who creatively expresses a distinct ‘voice’ within the structures of already existing literary genres.¹² Ricœur writes:

[T]he work [*œuvre*] is submitted to a form of codification that is applied to the composition itself, and that transforms discourse into a story, a poem, an essay, and so on. This codification is a literary genre; a work in other words, is characteristically subsumed to a literary genre. Finally a work is given a unique configuration that likens it to an individual and that may be called its style (Ricœur 1991a: 80).

For Ricœur, a work [*œuvre*] is a composition that retains an individual style, while, at the same time, it is codified in accordance with given structures.¹³ To affirm the distinct style of a work is, for Ricœur, to simultaneously acknowledge that it is determined by already existing genres. “Stylization,” he states, “occurs at the heart of an experience that is already structured but that is nevertheless characterized by openings, possibilities, indeterminacies” (Ricœur 1991a: 81). A work is composed in a way that is open to possibilities, but also inscribed in and determined by the structures of language and literary genre. In this sense, any writing composition happens within a horizon of tradition that allows for both creative innovation and structured conservation.

Furthermore, any composition of writing occurs within the structures and determinations of intertextuality. In other words, a text is not only speaking directly towards the things that it explicitly talks about, but also indirectly towards other texts. Put differently, any piece of writing is in conversation with and the interpretation of an already existing piece of writing. Ricœur represents the phenomenon of intertextuality as follows:

The simple juxtaposition of books in a library is, externally anyway, the first visible expression of the phenomenon of intertextuality. More subtle is the explicit citation, as the New Testament gives superabundant examples, a text authorizing somehow its novelty by

Scripture [*Écriture*] itself gathered diverse traditions belonging to diverse sources transmitted by different groups, tribes, or clans. Tradition, then, is not supplemental to Scripture, but constitutes it. Such units, in turn, would themselves become part of a history of interpretation and reinterpretation, constituting and developing the tradition (Ricœur 1974c: 45). Ricœur never made explicit the connection between structuralism and biblical criticism, but we can see parallels and overlap between the two that form an outline of a concept of tradition.

¹² This is a point that Ricœur also makes with respect to Scripture [*Écriture*]. The confessions of faith in biblical writings are inseparable from the forms or genres of biblical discourse – narrative, prophets, parables, hymns, etc. He writes, “These documents of faith do not primarily contain theological statements, in the sense of metaphysical speculative theology, but expressions embedded in such modes of discourse as narratives, prophecies, legislative texts, proverbs and wisdom sayings, hymns, prayers, and liturgical formulas. The first task of any hermeneutic is to identify these ordinary modes of discourse through which the religious faith of a community comes to language” (Ricœur 1974a: 73).

¹³ Here, Ricœur is influenced by the work of G.G. Granger and his concept of style, see Granger (1968).

reclaiming a word [*parole*] from antiquity, at the price of an undeniable revelation. More subtly still, a text, in inscribing itself in a series, will correct or rectify or even refute a similar text, but without expressly saying so; so does a narrator giving a new narration of the same mythical, legendary, or historical event (Ricoeur 1989: 400).

A composition of a text or writing is necessarily and always already determined, in a certain sense, not only by the structures of genres, but also the history of written texts with which it is explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously in conversation.

For Ricoeur, then, there is a mutual relationship between writing *and* tradition.¹⁴ Because writing is the paradigmatic locus of meaning, living tradition is necessarily mediated by writing if it is to have meaning in the lives of individuals and communities. Conversely, while writing expresses an individual style with a distinct voice, it is necessarily mediated by a tradition of already existing literary genres. Tradition without ‘writing’, on Ricoeur’s strict understanding of it, would be rendered uneventful and meaningless, and ‘writing’ without tradition would be simply a concatenation of divergent voices. It is only through the integration of style and genre in writing and the mutuality of writing and tradition that tradition retains a structure of continuity and permits change and innovation.

Conclusion: From Text to Phenomenon

This chapter worked progressively through Ricoeur’s concept of tradition as he developed it through the 1960s into the early 1970s and proceeded to unfold the mutual relations between word, writing, and tradition. By examining his earlier notion of tradition in his critical engagement with French structuralism and philosophy of language, we can see how it informs his later, more well-known reflections on Gadamer and the themes of critique and ideology, distanciation and belonging. To conclude, I want to work regressively from *écriture* to *parole* so as to delineate both the extent and limits of Ricoeur’s particular understanding of tradition in relation to human existence. We have seen that living tradition is necessarily mediated by writing [*écriture*], for it is the paradigm and manifestation of meaning. Writing is the locus of meaning that calls the ‘listening’ reader to respond. In turn, writing is necessarily mediated by tradition insofar as the individual style and ‘written voice’ is set against the horizon of literary genres. On this account, tradition without writing would be uneventful and meaningless, and writing without tradition would be simply a series of divergent voices. The integration of writing and tradition accounts for an understanding of tradition that is constituted by a continuous and unified structure as well as eventful and meaningful innovations and interpretations. Despite the necessary mediating function of writing, Ricoeur argues for the priority of the word [*parole*] at the basis of tradition. Even as meaning is nascent and inchoate in

¹⁴The relationship between writing and tradition has deep historical and religious roots regarding the debate over what relation, if any, there is between Scripture and tradition.

parole and achieves its full manifestation in *écriture*, the eventful character of *parole* remains fundamental to both writing and tradition. Living tradition is not an abstract and static structure, but primordially a concrete address that ‘speaks’ to the listening individual or community. It must not remain enclosed as a static conservation, but rather it must be open to semantic innovation. Put differently, tradition is not an object or deposit that we decode, but rather it is an originary relation of belonging to which we listen and interpret meaning. On this account, tradition without *parole* would be reduced to a meaningless, abstract, static structure, and *parole* without a structured tradition would be simply a concatenation of fleeting events. The integration of *parole* and tradition accounts for an understanding of tradition that is based on a concrete event, which speaks and demands interpretation and re-interpretation, all the while maintaining a structure and unity to these word-events.

Ricœur presents a critique of a dead and stagnant notion of tradition, conceived as an uneventful, abstract structure and meaningless deposit. Instead, he offers a constructive alternative for a living and dynamic sense of tradition that is both meaningful – and therefore mediated by writing – and eventful – and therefore a primordial concrete address of the word. Even as his efforts are directed to uncovering the deeper and more concrete dimensions of language and tradition by unfolding the priority of *parole* and the mediation of *écriture*, he also suggests that they do not circumscribe human existence. If we return briefly to Ricœur’s engagement with Heidegger’s ontology of language in the 1966 address that was cited earlier, he notes the programmatic organization of *Sein und Zeit* where the question of language arises at a particular moment in section 34 within the analytic of the existential constitution of *Dasein* (Ricœur 1966: 17714). The significance of the sequence and arrangement of the work is not lost on Ricœur:

What does this mean? That means that we came *to* language, and we don’t start from it and with it. And because we come to it we shall never be trapped in it...Everything will happen not within language but within this *Grundverfassung* by *Dasein* (Ricœur 1966: 17714).

Precisely at a moment when Ricoeur describes our concrete, primordial relation to language and tradition, he delineates the extent and limits of tradition in relation to human existence. The word, writing, and tradition preserve and innovate what has been opened up; something must be manifest before it is said or written.

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Involuntary Memory and Apprenticeship to Truth: Ricoeur Re-reads Proust

Jeanne Marie Gagnebin

Abstract This chapter examines Ricoeur's reading of *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust, which is developed in the second volume of *Time and Narrative*. It insists first and foremost on the corporeality of involuntary memory. Highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses of Ricoeur's interpretation, it argues that Ricoeur has not sufficiently emphasized the corporeal dimension of memory that is so crucial in Proustian descriptions, where it is primarily the body that remembers through the senses of taste, smell, touch, etc. Far from being secondary, the anchoring of memory in corporeality is essential to the sudden rediscovery of the time that was believed to be lost forever.

Keywords Memory • Truth • Body • Time • Narrative

In the preface to *Proust et la philosophie aujourd'hui (Proust and Philosophy Today)*, Mauro Carbone asserts:

Without doubt there is no writer of the twentieth century who has given us so much to think about as Proust – and continues to do so. One really never stops tracing in his work the signs of research that focus upon and also influence contemporary thought [...]. In contravention of the very justified doubts of writers like Milan Kundera, who suspect that philosophers will seek in Proust the proof of their theories, the question is rather much more that the work addresses directly those who approach it, whether they are philosophers or literary figures, giving them material *to think afresh* (Carbone and Sparvedi 2008: 13).

I propose to identify the main theses in Ricoeur's reading of Proust and also to discern those elements that are, to my mind, essential in the *Remembrance of Time Past* but that Ricoeur's reading leaves without comment, and to try and formulate a hypothesis that explains this omission.

As we know, *Remembrance of Time Past* is the key text chosen by Ricoeur in the second volume of *Time and Narrative* to demonstrate how literary narratives allow us to tell time, this "time" that otherwise escapes our attempts at conceptual understanding. The central part of this second volume, entitled "The Fictive Experience

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of Time”, is a beautiful homage by the philosopher of literature, in a direct line from his youthful homage to symbolic language in *The Symbolism of Evil*. If symbol and myth allow us to speak about the enigma of evil, then narrative, especially literary narrative, allows us to speak about time and to experience its passing in such a manner that this passing can be inscribed in signs. Thus Ricoeur amplifies his first example of the canticle of Saint Augustine in Book 11 of his *Confessions*, by recourse to literary works, and in particular to those works whose real theme is precisely these “games with time”, and more precisely “the fictional experience of time” that put on center stage the discrepancy between recounted time and the time of narrative (see Ricoeur 1986: 100 ff.).

After having covered *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf and then *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann, Ricoeur undertakes his reading of Proust’s *Remembrance* and declares right at the start that he will read the novel as a fable on time; this novel is about a “quest by himself [the hero- narrator] for whom the challenge is precisely the passage of time” (Ricoeur 1986: 131). Citing the work of Gilles Deleuze; *Proust and Signs* which declares that *Remembrance* is a work wherein the challenge is not time but actually truth, a “*Recherche*” (search) whose difficult apprenticeship means being apprenticed to signs, Ricoeur replies that Deleuze himself recognizes that truth “has a vital connection with time” (Ricoeur 1986: 131) and therefore that Deleuze’s argument does not invalidate Ricoeur’s own reading of *Remembrance* as a fable about time. I will return, during the course of my analysis, to this point of contention.

Let us underline the main points of Ricoeur’s reading. The first consists of the very clear distinction made between what Ricoeur calls the two narrative voices, “that of the hero and that of the narrator” (Ricoeur 1986: 134). This distinction structures *Remembrance* on two levels: first because the discrepancy between the voice of the narrator and that of the hero make it possible to introduce a concern about the temporality of writing thanks to the play of going forwards and backwards in time:

However, we must also be able to hear the voice of the narrator, who is ahead of the hero’s progress because he surveys it from above. It is the narrator who, more than a hundred times, says, ‘as we shall see later’. But, above all, the narrator gives the meaning to the experience recounted by the hero – time regained, time lost (Ricoeur 1986: 134).

This distinction makes it possible to show, in a very convincing manner, that *Remembrance* is defined by a long narrative route that is necessary for a gradual rapprochement, leading to the union of the hero’s and the narrator’s voices, at which point the narrator finally recognises his vocation and becomes a writer-narrator after all. When recalling that Proust wrote the first and the last volumes of *Remembrance* in the same period, Ricoeur thereby underlines the extent to which this gigantic novel is, according to the character who structures the story or the plot, a structure that follows the Aristotelian definition of *mythos*. This structure, closely resembling the Hegelian structure of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and the dialectic between the “*wir/we*” and consciousness, has the great merit of insisting on the temporal structure of the novel, as opposed to more impressionistic interpretations, as we can see

in anecdotes of *Remembrance* as a moral novel or a psychological novel. The emphasis placed on the structure of Proust's work reinforces Ricoeur's reading of *Remembrance* as a fable about time.

In one stroke all the pitfalls are eliminated that make recollection of time into a sort of mawkish image of an idealised past, in particular that of childhood. Thus, and rightly so, Ricoeur insists that, from the first evocation of the famous experience with the madeleine and up to the final accumulation of comparable sensory experiences in Prince Guermantes' library, the joy that the hero feels does not come from memory in and of itself, (remembering as something whose often trivial nature Proust enjoys underscoring) but really from the new understanding of time that this experience of "remembering" or of "recognition" permits us to seize – a concept that will furnish Ricoeur with the topic title of another book! Whence the importance of the little digression that closes the episode of the madeleine and of which Ricoeur asserts that only a reader with "a very discerning ear" can perceive: "although I did not yet know and must long postpone the discovery of why this memory made me happy" (Ricoeur 1986: 136). In fact, the response to this little digression will not be given until the end of the novel, during the aesthetic meditation in Guermantes' library. Thus Ricoeur can assert:

For a second, more educated reading, the ecstasy of the madeleine opens up the recaptured time of childhood, just as the meditation in the library will open up that of the time when the vocation, recognised at last, is put to the test. The symmetry between the beginning and the end is thus revealed to be a guiding principle of the entire composition [...]. This series of insets that govern the narrative composition does not prevent consciousness from advancing. To the confused consciousness of the first pages [...] replies the state of a consciousness that is awake, when the day dawns (Ricoeur 1986: 137).

Let us draw attention again to one key element of Ricoeur's interpretation: the philosopher cites several times the comparison between the work to be done by the narrator and the lenses that the "optician of Combray"¹ offers his clients which enable them to read better, as if the book to be read would permit the reader to read himself or herself better. For Ricoeur this is an image of the reconfiguration of the reader's own world, starting from the experience of reading, a hermeneutic moment that will occupy more and more importance in his theory of interpretation. Let us note that if Ricoeur clarifies this third moment of *mimesis* through Proust, as described in *Time and Narrative*, this connection can seem exaggerated. In fact, Proust only talks of reading in a way that is restricted to the individual model of interior and psychological reading. Finally, it should be noted that Proust's theory of metaphor is equally decisive for Ricoeur's reflexions, not only as it pertains to metaphor but also to the phenomenon of recognition (*The Rule of Metaphor* precedes *Time and Narrative* by about 10 years, and *The Course of Recognition* will

¹Ricoeur (1986: 150) cites Proust (1981: 1089): "For they [my readers] will not, according to me, be my readers, but real readers of themselves, my book being nothing more than a sort of magnifying glass like those that the optician in Combray holds out to a customer; my book, thanks to which I will provide them with the means to read themselves."

follow 20 years later). We cannot go into this topic here, but surely this is the most immanent theme of remembering and forgetting.

Now it is precisely this last problematic, that of remembering and forgetting, that seems to me to be strangely neglected in Ricoeur's interpretation – otherwise so convincing – of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. To express this quickly, even bluntly: when reading Ricoeur, it would seem that memory, in Proust, is only or perhaps uniquely a temporal "ecstasy", to re-use a Heideggerean term, that is already described as a movement of the soul in Saint Augustine. This is an essential movement as it permits the soul to inscribe the fleeting instant of the present by extending a *reprise* of the past that can, notably, assure a rather fragile narrative identity, when the "self" is placed between remembering the past and hope for the future, between the act of remembering (*Erinnerung*) and that of the promise. While we know that these themes have much importance in Ricoeur, they do not take account of an essential element in Proust, namely, the element that poses a risk to the organized continuity of time: remembering the body.

Let us try to develop this point further. Initially, it would be tempting, as Johann Michel suggests, to increase the differences between Ricoeur's hermeneutics and Deleuze's philosophy of immanence by a closer comparison of their interpretation of *Remembrance* (see Michel 2015: 97, note 24.). While I cannot develop this project fully here, I would nevertheless like to observe that the contrast between these two readings does not seem to reside between the "search for the truth" (Deleuze) and a "fable on time" (Ricoeur) but rather between their different conceptions of the relationship between "signs and truth" (which is the title of the second chapter of Deleuze's book). Deleuze insists upon the fortuitous character of Proustian signs, which would indeed be constraining precisely because truth is not a question of method or of good will:

Proust opposes the double idea of 'constraint' and 'chance' to the philosophical idea of 'method'. Truth depends on an encounter with something that forces us to think, to seek the true. Chance encounters and the pressure of constraint are the two fundamental Proustian themes. It is precisely the sign that becomes the object of an encounter, it is that which exerts such violence over us (Deleuze 1964: 25 (transl. ASB)).

Ricoeur, for his part, also insists on the dual role of signs in *Remembrance*: they prepare the narrator for disillusion and death, to be sure, but they also announce a revelation that is made explicit at the end of the book:

Between the considerable mass of narratives that extend over thousands of pages and the critical scene in the library, the narrator has thus worked in a narrative transition that shifts the sense of the *Bildungsroman* from the apprenticeship to signs to the visitation. Taken together, the two wings of this narrative transition serve at once to separate and suture the two foci of *Remembrance*. Separation, through the signs of death, confirming the failure of an apprenticeship to signs that lack the principle of their decipherment. Suture, through the premonitory signs of the great revelation (Ricoeur 1986: 143).²

²Note that Ricoeur always uses the term "visitation", which has an evangelical and thus religious origin – it is about the visit of Maria, pregnant with Jesus, to Elizabeth, pregnant with John the Baptist and the recognition by Elizabeth of the Messiah in Mary's belly! – to explain the scene in Guermantes' library.

In other terms, Ricoeur does not insist as much as Deleuze on the importance of chance in *The Remembrance of Time Past* but places more emphasis on the precise construction of the book, which is punctuated by the essential signs of discovery, the literary vocation of the narrator, and another truth about literature than the flat truths of so-called realist literature (whence the importance of the Goncourt pastiche at the beginning of the last volume and the narrator's farewell to that sort of literature).

In her remarkable work, *Proust ou le réel retrouvé (Proust or The Real Rediscovered)*, Anne Simon rereads *Remembrance* in light of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and concentrates on rehabilitating the presence and value of sensitivity in Proust's writing. So Deleuze's interpretation falls under a radical critique of idealism disguised under all its aspects for defending immanence and Nietzschean transvaluation. Simon writes:

The flesh of language, the general physicality of word and meaning are, contrary to Deleuze's affirmation, one of the essential themes of *Remembrance* [...]. Deleuze's interpretation, consisting of assimilating the Proustian concept of art into a theory of pure and immaterial sign, does not take account of the fact that Proust's writing does not seek to dematerialise the sign in order to ennoble it, but very much to the contrary, in order to make meaning surge forth, which then finds its foundation in the irreversible meeting with sensitivity, from the interior of linguistic materiality (Simon 2000: 93).

Simon thus denounces not only Deleuze's idealism, but also and equally the tendency of philosophical interpretations to privilege the first and last volumes of the *Remembrance*, which were written, as Ricoeur emphasizes, in the same period, and comprise a sort of theoretical and aesthetic scaffolding which makes it possible to insert the entire work into a philosophical edifice. Ricoeur affirms this when he speaks of *Remembrance* as an "ellipse of which one of its foci is remembering and the other is the visitation" (Ricoeur 1986: 151). What are the weaknesses of this philosophical reading of Proust?

The first is to take seriously the often Platonizing aesthetic theory exposed in the last volume (and which Walter Benjamin, in 1929, had already denounced as being inadequate), a theory linked to its time and without great originality (see Benjamin 1977: 320). The second weakness, which explains to a great degree the first, is to not take much more seriously, in hindsight, this form of partly monstrous proliferation that comprises the *body* of *Remembrance*, between the madeleine of the beginning and the paved courtyard of the Hotel Guermantes. This proliferation is due, certainly, to the First World War and also to Marcel Proust's passion for Alfred Agostinelli, but it also and primarily indicates that the writing of this work escapes the constructive will of its author (let us remember that Proust had predicted three volumes at the start of his novel!), as if another truth were speaking in this movement that was independent of his conscious will. Particularly a different truth from that of the aesthetic of beautiful style and the apprehension of the eternal by virtue of sensitive re-appearances translated into words. This truth escapes for the most part the concepts of Proust as theoretician and his philosophical readers; it is truth that has something to do with the burgeoning of writing, and with the independent, even wild, organic nature of the narrative pulse.

If I allow myself to speak of the *body* of the Proustian narrative or of an independent organicity of the text, it is because it seems plausible to me to establish a parallel in the *Remembrance* between a certain *corporality* of writing, which escapes the control of the conscious mind but may nourish this very consciousness, and the *corporality* of memory, in particular of course, involuntary memory, awoken by an olfactory and tactile sensation, which is to say coming from primitive sensations, notably in the infant, before the intellectual organization of vision. Exactly as Ulysses at Ithaca, beneath his beggar's rags, will be recognised by his dog Argos, for whom the sense of smell is infallible, and by his nurse, who touches the scar when she washes his feet,³ so the body in *Remembrance* remembers initially by taste, smell or touch, or even by a sort of internal touch, an involuntary touch of the body as a whole, still dulled by slumber. Let us re-read this famous paragraph at the beginning of *Remembrance*:

It was always the same when I awoke like this, my body trying to establish where I was, without success, everything rotating around me in the darkness: objects, countries, years. My body, too numb to move, seeking to follow the shape of its tiredness and locate the position of its limbs in relation to the wall, the positioning of the furniture, to reconstruct and identify the place where it found itself. The body's memory, that memory of ribs, knees, shoulders, recalled for him successive bedrooms in which he had slept, while around him invisible walls, changing position according to the shape of the imagined room, swirled about in the shadows. And even before my thought, oscillating on the threshold between time and form, had identified my dwelling place while reconciling it with the circumstances, it – my body – was recalling every detail of the bed, the positions of the doors, the angle of the windows, the existence of a corridor, together with whatever I had been thinking when I went to sleep, and which I found myself thinking again upon waking up (Proust 1981; transl. ASB).

This bodily memory, omnipresent in *Remembrance*, can be a reliable, faithful guardian of the past “that my spirit should never have forgotten”, writes Proust several lines below, as it can also, by stubborn continuity, deceive the hero about chronology. Thus, in the last volume, he can wake up in the middle of the night at Tansonville, in the home of Gilberte de Saint Loup, previously Gilberte Swann, and call Albertine, forgetting the death of his friend, because a “recollection budding in my arms made me look behind my back for the bell, just as in my bedroom in Paris” (Proust 1981; transl. ASB) – where his friend, now dead, used to fall asleep so often at his side. Thus this memory of the body is not infallible, but is really indispensable for searching and recognizing the lost time of the past. To become fertile, it is essential to have the relentless work of that which Proust calls the spirit, that which must recognize memory and give it a name. But without the body, the spirit is sterile. Or to put it another way: the spirit does not have to struggle against the body or control it, as in classical metaphysics, let us say broadly speaking Plato and Descartes, but must also learn to hear and to listen to this language that is both mute and imperious, in order to be able to name that which it would not have been able to create on its own, the “re-found real”.⁴

³These are the same examples Ricoeur uses in *The Course of Recognition* (2005), Study 2, section 1, “Ulysses makes himself known”.

⁴Allusion to Anne Simon's title *Proust ou le réel retrouvé* (2000).

If, according to the hypothesis developed from my reading, the boredom and the “detours” of the *Remembrance* reflect well the importance of this listening in the Proustian writing, then one can understand more why certain philosophizing interpretations have such difficulty in recognizing at the same time both the importance of the volumes that are supposedly intermediary, between the first experience of the madeleine and the explanation of it in the aesthetic theory of the final volume, and the importance of the body in the theory of involuntary memory.

Nonetheless this does not fail to surprise an author like Ricoeur. I echo here a penetrating remark made by Richard Kearney in a lecture given at Rio de Janeiro in November 2011. Kearney affirms: “The phenomenology of the body in Ricoeur continues like a debt that is never settled” and he names this wish a “carnal hermeneutics”.⁵ Indeed, this “carnal hermeneutics” is well developed in Ricoeur’s work; it is even an essential theme in his phenomenological analyses in *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, as Jean Grondin (2013: 32) also underlines.

Already Ricoeur links the theme of the “broken cogito”, a theme that will guide all his future reflections, to the subject renouncing personal commitment and the necessity of opening oneself to all that precedes oneself in terms of culture, language and, notable here, the corporality that constitutes him without him having chosen it. I cite a passage from this book that belongs, let us say, to the philosopher’s first, more phenomenological phase, a passage that could equally have been a commentary upon *The Remembrance of Time Past*:

Extension of the cogito to include personal body in reality requires more than a change of method: the ego must more radically renounce the covert claim of all consciousness, must abandon its wish to posit itself, so that it can receive the nourishing and inspiring spontaneity which breaks the sterile circle of the self’s constant return to itself (Ricoeur 1966: 14).

And several pages further on:

Thus the intention of this book is to understand the mystery as reconciliation, that is, as restoration, even on the clearest level of consciousness, of the original concord of vague consciousness with its body and the world (Ricoeur 1966: 18).

This theme of the “mystery of the body” that links *The Voluntary and the Involuntary* so closely to Merleau-Ponty’s legacy, is brilliantly present in Ricoeur’s luminous analyses of phenomena such as hesitation, attention or habit, or even “bodily spontaneity”, all themes that Proustian resonances can only touch on, let alone the Proustian vocabulary of involuntary memory that could form a chapter of *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. Why then does this theme of the body fade in Ricoeur? Why does the philosopher not fulfill the promise of a carnal hermeneutics, as Kearney requests, and this not even (or very little!) on the occasion, however propitious, of his reading of the *Remembrance*?

I do not have an adequate answer to this question, and can only indicate a few milestones inscribed along the philosopher’s own path. When, indeed, Ricoeur describes, in his “intellectual autobiography” (1995), how he develops from the first

⁵Richard Kearney’s article has been published in Portuguese in Nascimento and Salles (2013). See also Kearney’s chapter in this book.

volume of *The Philosophy of the Will*, namely, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (his doctoral thesis published in 1950) to the second, *Fallible Man*, he mentions of course the importance of Merleau-Ponty, but the theme of corporality is only picked up again in the theme of the “gift of life”. In his valuable little book, Jean Grondin (2013) himself also cites numerous passages linked to the problematic of the body and corporality in *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. By contrast, he underlines the fact that the second volume is dedicated to analysis of themes that are above all religious, those in which the will is useful; guilt, sin etc. In the *Symbolism of Evil*, there would even be a theory close to modernity, conceived as an epoch not only of disenchantment with the world, as in Max Weber, but, even more, as an epoch characterised by the loss of “the essential link” of man to the “sacred”, a loss interpreted by Ricoeur as a sort of “dehumanization” (Grondin 2013: 63). Could the importance of these questions clarify, in part, the muting of the problematic of the owned body and corporality?

If we return to Ricoeur’s intellectual autobiography (1995) we see that henceforth the accent is placed on an “all-encompassing dialectic of activity and passivity”, prelude to an ethic and a hermeneutic that will orient all his later philosophy. This is a little as if Ricoeur were reading his own journey in the light of his fundamental ethical preoccupations, always increasingly explicit in his philosophical journey about knowing a philosophy of capable man – capable of justice and beauty but also of evil. This human, acting and suffering, as he says innumerable times, interrogates himself about his projects and his motivations, but does not deal with his initial corporality again. All the more so since the famous “grafting of hermeneutic onto phenomenology” signifies, among other things, the renunciation of the search for an absolute point of departure, without presupposition, as he says forcibly in the famous conclusion to the second volume, entitled “The symbol gives rise to thought”:

We know the harassing, backward flight of thought in search of the first truth and, more radically still, in search of a point of departure that might well not be a first truth. The illusion is not in looking for a point of departure, but in looking for it without presuppositions. There is no philosophy without presuppositions. A meditation on symbols starts from speech that has already taken place, and in which everything has already been said in some fashion; it wishes to be thought of with its presuppositions. For it, the first task is not to begin but, from the midst of speech, to remember, to remember with a view to beginning (Ricoeur 1969: 348).

Leaving the “fullness of language”, as Ricoeur maintains on the same page, signifies thus the necessity of the “long detour via symbols and myths transported by the major culture”, this detour to which Ricoeur devotes himself in exemplary fashion, whether he is reading or re-reading myths, philosophical traditions or literature. But this long detour is attached to cultural works that signify, and that the hermeneutic can reinterpret, particularly from the point of view of a just ethic of action. This essential detour seems, however, to forget that which Ricoeur the phenomenologist had tried to describe: the opacity of the body.

Everything happens as if the hermeneutist, caught up in the joy and also the effort of re-reading the linguistic works in which his own word is inscribed, had

forgotten that which the phenomenologist was affirming: to know that corporality is definitely not the ultimate and prime point of departure for triumphant thought, but actually a materiality that would not be exhaustible in terms of linguistic signifiers. Yet this materiality, if it escapes the will, nevertheless nourishes the very existence of the thinker and even the actual possibility of thought, because this, thought, is not only the signifying richness of language but also the enigmatic density of human corporality.

And in order to return to *Remembrance*, we need to underline that *Remembrance* is not only that which allows narrative to finish, but also that which menaces it, because, “in order to become visible”, it “seeks bodies and, where ever it finds them, it seizes them in order to shine upon them its magic lantern”, as Proust writes, cited by Ricoeur (1986: 146), when the narrator confronts old age and death in the macabre dance that closes the final volume.

Thus, to the realm of signs that the hermeneutist covers, it would be necessary to add a more obscure territory, made perhaps more menacing by the flight of philosophical thought; the territory of the body, of its memories, its joys and its pleasures, but also its failures and its sufferings.

(Translated by Alison Scott-Baumann)

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Memory, Space, Oblivion

Luis António Umbelino

Abstract This chapter examines the philosophical implications of Ricoeur’s claim that there is something like a mysterious connection of time and space in memory. How then can we approach memory from the side of space? The answer, according to Ricoeur, is to be found in phenomenological descriptions of bodily spatiality, but also in a hermeneutical approach toward the question of how narrative offers a model to think both human time and human space

Keywords Space • Memory • Architecture • History • Oblivion

Places

Let us start with a quotation from Ricoeur’s *Memory, History, Forgetting*: “One does not simply remember oneself, seeing, experiencing, learning; rather one recalls the situations in the world in which one has seen, experienced, learned” (Ricoeur, Paul 2000: 44 [36]). This is an important claim made at a moment when Ricoeur reflects on the unstable polarity between reflexivity and mundane situations. He is saying that we don’t just remember ourselves inhabiting, but also to have inhabited in a particular house; we don’t just remember ourselves voyaging, but to have voyaged to some part of the world. In other words, there’s something like an environmental spatiality inherent to the evocation of a memory (Ricoeur, Paul 2000: 184 [148]), a kind of spatiality that is not something added on to an already complete memory of something, but that seems to be a part of what is remembered. It is as if memory depended on places, and as if my memories were kept by specific locations: a museum, a house, a street, a city. Hence Ricoeur, the philosopher of time, does not ignore the mysterious connection of time and space in memory. And not only did he not overlook the spatial side of memory, but he also paid the necessary attention to the question of knowing how something material – a building, a street,

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a city, an object – can hold and protect our memories. On other occasions (Umbelino 2011: 67–81; Umbelino 2013: 325–334) I have outlined the main features of what Ricoeur thus proposes. Here I will return to some of those features in order to draw on their application and to test them in face of some significant examples.

At the School of Phenomenology

According to Ricoeur, in order to approach memory “on the side of space”, we must begin by turning to a phenomenology of place such as the one developed by Edward Casey (Ricoeur, Paul 2000: 185 [149]; Casey 1998; Casey 2009). The phenomenological approach establishes the possibility of suspending the natural attitude (with its prejudices) and, by doing so, of escaping from the objectivistic perspective that supports a conception of absolute, *a priori*, and exhaustible space – a conception that brings with it an idea of place (*lieu*) as a simple portion of definable and compartmented space (Casey 2009: 317–318). This suspension thus brings us back to a radical perspective on space, prior to those informed by a geometrical conception of Euclidian, Cartesian and Newtonian space. Such a perspective is described by a phenomenological approach to corporeal spatiality that unfolds, as Merleau-Ponty puts it in *Phénoménologie de la perception*, a body transmitting an “already acquired spatiality” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 293). In view of such archaic processes by which we are always corporeally in place, dwelling in the depth of space, we must then make, according to Casey, a distinction not only between space (geometric and homogeneous space) and place, but also between place and site. “Places” are qualitative, relational, all enveloping, intimate and providers of orientation. That is why we can truly dwell in them. But this also why places allow us to consider the phenomenon of remembering from a precise perspective: because they appear in the connection between the world and the lived body, because they are found, in a way, not only here or there but also at the center of what we are. They can be said to hold our memories.

In this context, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological descriptions of the way space appears in bodily motility are still decisive. He explains that because our primitive corporeal experience of the world is to have a place (already inside space) from which to see, the “acquired spatiality” of the body is never empty, never neutral, and never possible to surmount. To belong to the world as a living body means to be in a place in a lived space, a space that is always already “oriented” and “incorporated”. It is “oriented” because, in place, the lived body is the center from which the fundamental asymmetric relations of space (attached to the body’s “ambidextrous proclivities”)¹ are sketched (Casey 2009: 48); it is “incorporated”, because to

¹This is way the body tends toward bifurcation (not to be mistaken with geometric bisection) and towards arranging its choices, directions, and movements as right-left, near-far, up-down, above-below, here-there, and so on

be *in place* is, for the body, to dilate, to expand and to include in its flesh objects (as the blind man, to use Merleau-Ponty's example, incorporates his cane), landscapes, or even phantoms of others just present. On this archaic level, to-be-in-the-world means to "have" a memory of the body's spatiality, that is to say to "be" the memory of belonging as a body to the world.

Merleau-Ponty finds confirmation of this possibility in the phenomenon of habit (which recalls the famous distinction made by Bergson between *mémoire-habitude* and *mémoire-souvenir*). In fact, to acquire the habit of doing something is in some sense to make things *in-habit* ourselves, to make them "participate in the own body's voluminosity" (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 168). It is by this sort of embodied annexation, by this bodily installation on the things of the world that we can, for instance, type without knowing explicitly, at each moment, with which finger we type each key. And yet the body "knows" the place of the keys of the typewriter or the keyboard. If someone asks us which finger typed a certain letter, we have to mimic the movement and the rhythm of typing to find the right answer: as if it were "in the hands" (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 168) that an acted (or re-enacted) memory of the body's archaic correspondence with space was inscribed. This body memory is the first sketch of memory: first of all, we remember how space is incorporated by the body.

But if this is the case, isn't it necessary to conceive a transition from strict body memory to the memory of places and objects? The thing is that, as Merleau-Ponty still acknowledges, some places and objects seem themselves to hold traces of my existence as well as the traces of existences that are not my own. Objects, "routes, plantations, villages, streets, utensils, a horn, a spoon, a pipe" (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 399) that are around me in the present, as the body incorporates them, seem to hold and unfold "memories" of their own: memories of other lives, of other histories, of unknown relations to things, of ways to handle tools, of ways to practice a city – as if a sense of the past of others remains spatially remembered by those objects, streets and cities. But if this is the case, this necessary transition gives rise to a major question that must be addressed to a strictly phenomenological approach. The question has to do with whether the relation between memory and place can in fact be conceived "without the help of the mixed categories that join lived time and lived space to objective time and geometrical space, which the epoché has methodically bracketed to the benefit of a "pure" phenomenology." (Ricoeur, Paul 2000: 51 [42]).

The Hermeneutic Turn

To bring our analysis of the "spatial side" of memory to its full consequences, Ricoeur holds that we must surpass the non-implication between lived space and geometric space. As Ricoeur puts it, "memorable places" would not be able to exercise their "memorial function" if they were not also "notable sites" (Ricoeur, Paul 2000: 52 [43]). This is somewhat different from what Casey would say. For Casey

embodied existence opens onto place and “indeed takes *place in place* and nowhere else, so our memory of what we experience in place is likewise place-specific” (Casey 1987: 182). In comparison with place, according to Casey, a mere site has a negative quality: its indifference, emptiness, exteriority and geometrical abstraction, its arid strangeness tends to wipe out the power of place and to erase the possibility of memory (as it is always emplaced). For Ricoeur, on the contrary, we should not forget the ambiguity, the mixture, between the intimacy of places and the exteriority of sites. In other words, we could say that a phenomenology of place needs a hermeneutic turn in order to surpass the mutually exclusive contrasts - similar to those of time - that tend to oppose and mutually exclude a conception of “geometric space” from a conception of “lived space”. Through this hermeneutic turn, Ricoeur argues that we can discover the meaning of “human space” – a space that can only be located at the point of rupture and suture between lived space and geometric space.

This is an important and decisive claim, which raises the question of how to find this point of rupture and suture. Here Ricoeur’s argument is astonishingly simple but deep: only architectural and urban constructions can reveal and disclose this point. “It is architecture,” Ricoeur contends, “that brings to light the noteworthy composition that brings together geometric space and that space unfolded by our corporeal condition” (Ricoeur, Paul 2000: 186 [150]). The built spaces of architecture and of urbanism “geometrize” the lived space of the body, and “humanize” the objective and three-dimensional coordinates of geometric space. And in doing, a human space is accessed both by the way a building *expresses* our inhabiting, and by the way we complete each construction by living it meaningfully. We could then say that architecture and urbanism are “for space what narrative is for time” (Ricoeur 1998: 44): they are a way to access human space through a kind of narrative plot (Ricoeur 1998: 48).

Architecture and urbanism develop a “triple *mimesis*” of space that is comparable to the one that narrative develops with regard to time (Ricoeur 1983: 85 ff.). This is not simply an analogy or close parallel. Narrative time and built space are not just comparable: they can “exchange their significations” (Ricoeur 1998: 49) through a kind of intersection. Narrative lends “its temporality to the act of building, to the configuration of space”, and architecture lends its exemplar spatiality to the act of narrating time. It can thus be argued that, according to Ricoeur, a sense of the past remains attached to the way built human spaces join memory and narrative. This, of course, cannot be understood as a simple psychological feature (Malpas 1999: 117). On the contrary, it must be emphasized that our way of being (of identity, thought, action, remembering, etc.) is *wed* to our engagement with a place or a site; it is tied to the way we humanize or make our own the built projects we inhabit with others.

But how exactly can a built space open up memory? How can it hold and protect memories? Ricoeur offers important answers to these questions when he faces the complexity of the articulation between memory, materiality and history.

Memory, Materiality and History

To have something of the past is always to have a sense of the conditions by which the present and future are organized into a “history”, by a plot that can only be articulated through interactions with objects, other individuals and various situations that are corporeally engaged and emplaced (Malpas 1999: 180). This is true both from an individual point of view and a collective point of view. But the question remains: how do human spaces open and keep our individual and collective memories? In order to find an answer we must return to Ricoeur’s concept of “refiguration” or *mimesis III* and consider it from “the side of space”.

In *Time and Narrative*, the concept of “refiguration” marks the idea that the narrative act of “configuration” can only be fully accomplished if it is reinstalled in “the time of acting and suffering” (Silva 2005: 67), following the model of the encounter between the world of the text and the world of the reader (Ricoeur 1983: 109) established through the act of reading (Ricoeur 1986: 170). According to Ricoeur, something similar can be said about architecture’s narrative of space, as it also opens itself to a kind of “refiguration”, to the reading of those who inhabit each architectural project. The significance of these projects cannot be found in the literality of what is built, but in the formative appropriation of them (Ricoeur 1986: 170). To live in a human space is to read and re-read the different ways of inhabiting that are expressed by buildings and urbanistic projects. This is an important thesis: the comprehension of oneself is possible through the interpretation of texts and also (Ricoeur 1998: 51) through the attentive interpretation of built spaces. They provide alternative possibilities of giving meaning to our actions by a synthesis of the heterogeneous, by harmonizing what is discordant, by proposing alternative worlds of meaning through which we can recover – and, in a way, truly and actively remember –, our own humanity in a more meaningful and authentic manner.

With regard to this “side of human space”, Ricoeur finds particularly good examples and demonstrations of a new approach to memory: an approach that treats it not only as a “matrix of history”, but as instructed and injured by history. That is to say that it is approached as a question of the “re-appropriation” of the historical past under the model of reading (both of texts and of humanized built spaces), under the horizon of a duty to memory, and under the metaphor of debt. “What I am proposing today,” Ricoeur states in an essay that refers to some of the conclusions of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, “is a shift in the prevailing standpoint, a shift from writing to reading, or, to put it in broader terms, from the literary elaboration of the historical work to its reception, either private or public, along the lines of a hermeneutics of reception” (Ricoeur 2003). The idea is thus to go beyond a relation of memory and history based on a mutual absolute conception and, at the same time, to expand the limits of a homogenized approach to the past that sometimes descends into mere archival and cataloguing work on historical documents. In my view, Ricoeur allows us to think that it is also from a spatial point of view that we can do so and, at the same time, consider the decisive questions concerning memory instructed by history: the injuries of memory, the duty to remember and oblivion.

In order to illustrate this new way of thinking about the relations between human space, history and memory they convey, let us consider two different examples: the place of the concentration camp of Auschwitz, and the site of Ground Zero in New York.

Today Auschwitz is not a museum, even if there are some who think it is a museum; it is not a cemetery, even if it could well be one; it is not a site for tourism, even if it is visited by thousands of people (Pereira 1999: 199). What is left of the camp (the materiality of what was constructed and still remains, of what was reconstructed, of the ruins, of the empty spaces) is, nowadays, more than anything a *space* where memory can be in place. First of all, what's left of the camp seems to kindle a deep and decisive relation between silence and memory. This allows us to say that the human space holds memory when it consents to silence. Secondly, Auschwitz sustains a "sense of the now" that continues to be pervaded by the persistence of something that was. Even for those who visit Auschwitz for the first time, the space of the Camp works as exemplar evidence of remembrance (and not only of past events of human horror and suffering) that offers itself as a support for frail memory. Finally, Auschwitz remains an example of a space in which the persistence of what once was continues to be a way to, both individually and collectively, fight back. That space holds memory as motive of a particular relation to the past: a relation to the past as debt, as an active engagement in the restitution of deep and still operant senses of the past. Narrated time and built space are thus already "exchanging their meanings" (Ricoeur 1998: 49).

Let us consider a second example: Ground Zero in New York. In that urban space there is a memorial where the names of the victims of 9/11, of the attacks on the World Trade Center in 1993, and of those who died during the rescue operations are inscribed. The names of the victims are written on the seventy-six bronze plates that are attached to the parapet walls that form the edges of two enormous artificial quadrangular lakes. These lakes are themselves inscribed in the landscape as if they were two gigantic footprints left by the twin towers. Visiting this site we could say that through the durability of the stone, the new project tries to hold the absences and voids left by the terrorist attacks – and it tries to do so in space and in a way that allows for narration.

Built spaces can memorialize in stone, but they can also help save memory both from active forgetfulness and from the danger of repetition as it can be blocked, namely, by resentment (Ricoeur 2005). They provide a kind of plot about the absence of what once was, but also of what remains to be told. Projects like the Ground Zero memorial hold and preserve memory as they allow for a recapitulation and an appropriation of a past that is no longer, but that has been - a recapitulation and an appropriation that provides a place for a reorganization of the old in order to give room for the new (Ricoeur 1998: 51). This is how both individual and collective memory can become a possibility to escape resentment, a possibility to express the tragedy in a bearable way, in a way can be shared and became a new beginning. In the "refiguration" of built spaces we can thus find narrative opportunities to break the circle of blocked remembering and resentment, and to find something like the thing of memory: the possibility to once again tell the story of what we cannot forget, even if forgetting is all we want to do.

Built spaces are, in a sense, critical resources of a memory that, under the superficial history of humankind, is the keystone of the vulnerability and fragility of human history. Like literature, theatre, sculpture or cinema,² built spaces continue to *re-enact*, in the durability of the stone, what has been and, in this way, they can always instruct memory with intuitive remembrances of, for example, the past suffering of others that cannot be repeated. As they open up the possibility of critical refiguration under the model of reading, human spaces thus help us fight against oblivion, against historical and cultural amnesia, against active forgetfulness, against the danger of obsessive repetition. And they do so by keeping together a history that, as a stream bed, truly brings us together (Pereira 1999: 209) around a duty to remember (*devoir de mémoire*) that calls for the justice that is due to the victims of all times.

Final Remarks

Built spaces can contribute to the struggle against oblivion, not only because they can preserve traces of the past, but especially because they can oppose the attempts to expunge memory. They help us to remember more than we thought possible, more than we ourselves experienced individually. Working with Freudian concepts (Ricoeur, Paul 2000: 84 ff. [69 ff.]; Pereira 1999: 194–195), Ricoeur will argue, in this context, that the duty of memory must be grafted on to a work of memory (*travail de mémoire*) that always demands a work of mourning (*travail de deuil*) – capable of stopping resentment and shame, capable of acting as the opportunity to accept the unacceptable of the past. These considerations become decisive (beyond the strict context of psychoanalyses) if we consider closely what derives from the several forms of “active oblivion” (Ricoeur 2005): strategies of “deflection”, “evasion”, “escape”, of “not wanting to know” are forms of oblivion in the sense that they try to hide shameful or difficult memories.

Against these strategies, some built spaces (some truly human spaces) – like *books of stone* – can offer consistency, under the model of the text and the reader, to the duty of not forgetting, of not suspending a responsible attitude towards the singular and collective past, of not being an accomplice to active oblivion. Space can thus help us to make a proper use of the wounds of memory. And, in fact, what would become of the lessons of a memory-reconstruction without all the spaces where memory is held in reserve?

²Ricoeur makes an explicit reference to cinema in his presentation at Budapest in 2003. He talks about the film *Shoah* from Claude Lanzmann and *Schindler's List*, directed by Spielberg. We could add, in the same context, *La Vita è Bella* from Roberto Benigni, *Nuit et Brouillard*, a film by Alain Resnais, or *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, directed by Mark Herman. Such films re-enact spaces of the past and by doing so they give us in the present the *landscapes* of past suffering, helping us to fight against oblivion.

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The Enigma of the Past: Ricoeur's Theory of Narrative as a Response to Heidegger

Pol Vandavelde

Abstract This chapter examines how Ricoeur has used two Heideggerean distinctions in order to circumscribe the “enigma of the past”: first, the distinction between the past that is no longer (*Vergangenheit*) and the past that is still relevant and meaningful to us (*das Gewesene*) and, second, the distinction between an event (*Ereignis*), as what makes history possible, and a historical fact, as what falls into historical times and can be recorded. In order to situate the problem I appeal to Nietzsche's second “Untimely Consideration” about the “uses and disadvantages of history for life,” which both Ricoeur and Heidegger use and in which Nietzsche speaks of the “power of the present,” when it comes to retelling the past. Both Heidegger and Ricoeur acknowledge this power. However, against Heidegger's view that there is a rupture between *Historie* and *Geschichte* or between event and historical facts, Ricoeur sees narratives as guaranteeing a continuity between these two poles. In order to test the plausibility and fruitfulness of Ricoeur's and Heidegger's distinctions, the chapter examines some “events” at the end of WWII that belong to “German suffering” and examine the nature of the delay that took place between the “happening” of these events and their recognition several decades later as “historical facts.”

Keywords History • Narrative • Event • Attestation • German suffering

Ricoeur's reflections on history and narrative are motivated by what he calls the “enigma” of the past (Ricoeur 1985: 141; 1988: 77), which consists of the fact “that the past, which is no longer, has effects, exerts an influence, and action [*Wirkung*] on the present” (1985: 141; 1988: 77). He also calls it a “paradox”: “The paradox of the historical past in its entirety lies here. On the one hand, it is no longer; on the other, the remains of the past hold it still present-at-hand [*vorhanden*]” (1985: 141–142; 1988: 77). In Ricoeur's multiple efforts to circumscribe such an enigma, Heidegger remains one of his main sources. As Ricoeur writes in the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, “there is no way I can measure my debt as regards the

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ultimate contribution of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology to the theory of time" (1985: 131; 1988: 71). Yet, at the same time, Heidegger's work is also a challenge to Ricoeur and it is in part to address this challenge that Ricoeur refines his theory of narrative.

Heidegger presents at least two views of history. The first view, developed in *Being and Time*, is one that Ricoeur examines and criticizes at length in *Time and Narrative* and later in *History, Memory, Forgetting*. It concerns history as an existential condition of human beings that precedes historiography and makes it possible. The second view of history is of an event in which human existence and anything historical become possible. Such an event as what opens history itself escapes historiography. Although Ricoeur does not discuss this second notion of history in reference to Heidegger, he does reflect on the notion of the event and distinguishes it from a historical "fact."

The challenge for Ricoeur is the break that Heidegger establishes in history. In *Being and Time* it is the break between existential time—the being-historical (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of Dasein as an ontological condition—and cosmological time or vulgar time, which is the time measured and dated. Later on, there is a break between what makes historical time possible—the event—and what falls within historical times. In both cases, Ricoeur wants to re-establish continuity. Regarding the first break, there are, Ricoeur argues, traces of the past that help us connect the time that is datable and measurable with existential time—the historical condition of human beings. Regarding the second break, but without discussing Heidegger specifically, Ricoeur wants to keep a referential link between "facts," which historians can establish, interpret and re-interpret differently, and the "event," which functions as an "ultimate referent" [*réfèrent ultime*] (2000: 227; 2004: 179) of historical narratives or as their "receding horizon," as he says about the incompleteness of the work of memory (2000: 537; 2004: 413).

It is this Heideggerean challenge that I would like to examine further. My focus is on Ricoeur's views on historical narratives, and I use Heidegger's positions as a foil to present the challenge that Ricoeur recognizes and attempts to meet. In order to make the focus more forceful I appeal to Nietzsche's second "Untimely Consideration" titled "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1972: 239–330; 1997: 57–123) on which both Ricoeur (1985: 423–433; 1988: 235–240 and 2000: 377–384; 2004: 287–292) and Heidegger (1984: 396; 1962: 448 and 1996: 524f) have commented with some approval. I restrict my use of Nietzsche to what he calls the "force of the present" [*die Kraft der Gegenwart*] (1972: 289–290; 1997: 94. Translation modified). It is the present, Nietzsche says, that guides how the past will be preserved, such that any history is a history of the present. Heidegger uses this expression in *Being and Time: Geschichte der Gegenwart* (1984: 393; 1962: 445).¹ History as made in the present is predicated on a radical break with the past to the extent that the past is always interpreted and reconstructed so that it is its

¹Let us note that Michel Foucault also makes use of the formulation of a history of the present, which he explains as follows: "to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently" (1984: 15; 1985: 9).

use that matters to the present, whether positively—enhancing the present and the future—or negatively—hindering and impeding them. The past is what the present allows it to be.

I explore this issue, first, by examining how Ricoeur reformulates the two Heideggerean distinctions mentioned above and, second, by testing the plausibility and fruitfulness of these two distinctions against some “events” at the end of WWII related to “German suffering,” which took a rather long time to become “historical facts”: the bombings of German cities by the allies and the abuse of German women by Red Army soldiers in 1945. These test cases are necessary for the discussion. On the one hand, they are an apt illustration of the vocabulary that Nietzsche uses about the past. History can be a “malady” and the remedy can be the “unhistorical” in the form of forgetting, and this manifests the force of the present. It seems indeed that German suffering had been forgotten for several decades before being now fully recognized. On the other hand, the “delay” that took place between the happening of these events and their becoming “historical facts” points to a form of discontinuity that may represent a significant challenge for Ricoeur.

Heidegger's Distinctions in Their Nietzschean Flavors

The first Heideggerean distinction Ricoeur uses comes from *Being and Time*. Ricoeur discusses it explicitly in the third volume of *Time and Narrative* and in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. There are, Heidegger says, two aspects of the past: the past that is gone and is no longer, what he calls *Vergangenheit*—the past as past—and the past that is still relevant and meaningful to us, bearing upon the present, what he calls *das Gewesene* or *Gewesenheit*—the past that “has passed” (1984: 393; 1962: 445). In opposition to the past that is gone and is no longer, what “has passed” is “still unfolding” [*das noch Wesende*] (Heidegger 1998: 103). In *Being and Time* “being-historical” [*geschichtlich*] is a feature of *Dasein* so that anything “historical” [*historisch*] is always within the clearing opened by human existence in its being-historical and thus always an existential qualification made by human beings (in the present) for the sake of their future. Thus, if the past is still relevant to us now, it is because it belongs to “being-historical” [*Geschichtlichkeit*] as the very temporalization of *Dasein*, linked to care and being-toward-death. The view of the past as simply elapsing originates from ordinary or vulgar time as what is caught within a series of nows, specifically that part of the series that has elapsed. In fact, for Heidegger, past events are within a past *Dasein*, which he calls “a *Dasein* that has been there” [*Da-gewesenes Dasein*] (1984: 393; 1962: 445). As a consequence and as Heidegger has repeated *ad nauseam*, historiography [*Historie*] as the history that we narrate gives our interpretation or understanding of the happening that took place [*Geschichte*], but the happening as a condition of possibility for “historical facts” always escapes those facts precisely because it is the unfolding of such facts. For Heidegger, this points to the close connection between “what is,” at the ontological level, and temporality as the unfolding or happening that allows for

something to be. It is the link between “being” and “time,” as canonically embedded in the work of 1927.

The second distinction concerns the difference between an event and a fact. Heidegger makes this distinction in the 1930s when meditating on the link between “being” and “history.” He speaks of *Ereignis*, “event,” which he differentiates from facts and actions that fall into historical times and can be recorded, recollected, interpreted and re-examined. This leads him to speak of a “history of being” [*Seinsgeschichte*], which is not a history taking being as its object, but being as happening. Dasein is not only a clearing as in *Being and Time*, but is itself already within the openness of another clearing: Dasein is seen as being within a history of being. In such a history of being there are events [*Ereignisse*], but these events are openings of history and thus never susceptible to be objects of historical narratives. They in fact make history possible. This “history of being” that Heidegger introduces in the 1930s is even more radically discontinuous than in *Being and Time* and adopts a view of history as rupture,² each rupture being a “beginning” [*Anfang*] and opening history.³ Heidegger speaks of a “first” and “another” beginning. The “other” beginning is not a “new” beginning, which would still be in continuity with the previous one, but “other” and thus unknown.⁴ Given that the “beginning” is that event that opens the framework within which things and people gain significance and become “what” and “who” they are, the “other” beginning holds the promise or the threat of being “radically” different from the previous one, the one we know and are familiar with.

These two distinctions can be connected to Nietzsche’s views on history. As both Ricoeur and Heidegger note, Nietzsche considers history as what human beings do for their own purpose. The title of his second “untimely consideration” says it all: history can be helpful or harmful to human beings. Nietzsche writes: “That life is in need of the services of history [...] must be grasped as firmly as must the proposition [...] that an excess of history is harmful to the living man” (1972: 254; 1997: 67). History can be a “malady,” what Nietzsche calls a “malady of history [*historische Kankheit*]” (1972: 327; 1997: 121) when there is an excess of it. But, there are three respects in which history can be useful: “History pertains to the living man in three respects: it pertains to him as a being who acts and strives, as a being who preserves and reveres, as a being who suffers and seeks deliverance” (1972: 254; 1997: 67). Corresponding to these three aspects of human beings, there are three kinds of history. The first kind is monumental history, which celebrates past achievements to give “models, teachers, comforters” (1972: 254; 1997: 67).

²On the notion of rupture in Heidegger see Iyer (2014).

³Heidegger makes a connection between these ruptures and what he calls “origin” [*Ursprung*] in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” He qualifies art as what “lets truth originate [*entspringen*]” (Heidegger 1971: 77; 1977: 65) and thus as an *Ur-sprung*, an origin or a primal leap. “Whenever art happens [*geschieht*]—that is, whenever there is a beginning [*Anfang*]—a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again [*fängt Geschichte erst oder wieder an*]” (Heidegger 1971: 77; 1977: 65).

⁴I have examined this transition in Vandavelde (2012).

This helps people of action to reach happiness in the expectation that they too will find “a place of honor in the temple of history” (1972: 255; 1997: 68). Antiquarian history—the second kind—is the preservation and veneration of the past as an act of giving thanks for one’s own existence, but also as “a simple feeling of pleasure and contentment over the modest, rude, even wretched conditions in which a man or a nation lives” (1972: 262; 1997: 73). Critical history—the third kind—is a way of “breaking up” and “dissolving” a part of the past by “bringing it before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it” (1972: 265; 1997: 75–76).

Through these distinctions Nietzsche makes the point that those who recount the past are not just engaged in an activity of recounting, but are always part of the past itself as it is recounted: “knowledge of the past has at all times been desired only in the service of the future and the present” (1972: 267; 1997: 77). Telling the history of the past is thus always, in different degrees, doing a history of the present in the sense of manifesting what kinds of questions, problems, or issues we have with the past and what kind of perspectives, methods, or approaches we use toward the past. Although objectively directed at what is no longer, the recounting of the past also tells us who we are as narrators. “If you are to venture to interpret the past you can do so only out of the fullest exertion of the force [*Kraft*] of the present: only when you put forth your noblest qualities in all their strength will you divine what is worth knowing and preserving and what is great in the past” (1972: 289–290; 1997: 94. Translation modified).

While Ricoeur refers to Nietzsche and uses Heidegger, the fundamental problem he has with both of them is their strict separation between the past as being no longer and the past as still unfolding, on the one hand, and between the event as irruption of novelty and facts that can be documented and recounted, on the other (although, to repeat, Ricoeur does not discuss this second distinction in relation to Heidegger, but rather historians like Henri-Irénée Marrou or Pierre Nora).

Narratives as an Attempt to Resolve the Enigma of the Past⁵

In *Memory, History, Forgetting* Ricoeur reformulates the first Heideggerean distinction as an “opposition between the having-been of the authentic past and the elapsed past that escapes our grasp” (2000: 395; 2004: 300). He states that this strict distinction creates “a gap between having-been and the past ... insofar as what, in fact, opens the way for an inquiry into the past are visible remains” (1985: 144; 1988: 79). It is within “vulgar” time—the sequence of nows—that we have visible traces of the passage of time, and it is on the basis of these traces that we can reconstruct the “passing” of time or its bearing upon us. Thus, against Heidegger, Ricoeur tries to show that being-historical [*Geschichtlichkeit*] is “the bridge that is erected within the phenomenological field itself between Being-toward-death and world-time”

⁵I have discussed Ricoeur’s theory of narrative in Vandavelde (2008: 141–162) and (2013: 244–259).

(1985: 177; 1988: 96) or between mortal time, which is oriented toward the future, and cosmological time, which Heidegger dismisses as a sequence of nows. Because of his unilateral view of the past, Ricoeur argues, Heidegger leaves unresolved “the problem ... of the relationship between the fundamental time of Care, the temporality directed toward the future and toward death, and ‘vulgar’ time, conceived as a succession of abstract instants” (1985: 220; 1988: 120. Translation modified.).

With regard to the second Heideggerean distinction, Ricoeur also argues that there is continuity between the event, which happened, and the facts that historians establish. Events exert the function of what Ricoeur calls an “ultimate referent” and a “counterpart” (*vis-à-vis*), which exercise a “claim” on the historical past. It is “the claim of a *Gegenüber* no longer in existence today on the historical discourse that intends it” as well as a “power of incitement and rectification in relation to all historical constructions, insofar as these are considered to be reconstructions” (1985: 335; 1988: 184). The term “counterpart” translates Karl Heussi’s *Gegenüber*. Ricoeur writes: “It is to preserve this status of counterpart [*vis-à-vis*] of historical discourse that I distinguish the fact as ‘something said,’ the ‘what’ of historical discourse, from the event as ‘that about which one talks’ [*la chose dont on parle*], the ‘that about which the historical discourse speaks’ [*le ‘au sujet de quoi’ est le discours historique*]” (2000: 228; 2004: 179. Translation modified).

These are the stakes and the challenge for Ricoeur. Although in agreement with Heidegger that the past that is gone or the event cannot be retrieved as such, Ricoeur is adamant that narratives can actively build a bridge and thus be themselves such a bridge between the past that is no longer and the past that is still relevant as well as between the event that has “actually” happened and the historical facts that can be established by historians. Historical narratives may thus resolve the “enigma” of the past. Instead of simply referring to events that would pre-exist historical constructions, narratives in fact actively “represent” the past that is gone or the event so that the event is both what is “presented” within the narrative and what motivates the narrative. Although the event cannot be a mere “referent,” it can be an “ultimate” one and although it is not the “object” of a narrative account, it can be the “counterpart” or *Gegenüber* of such a narrative. Ricoeur sees two features of narratives that work together to secure an active “bridging” in the form of a “representing.” Because narratives are made of language and include an element of composition, configuration or fiction, we must, first, recognize that historical narratives cannot be a direct match of what has happened, even though they claim to form a representation of what has taken place. We have to guard “against the illusion of believing that what we call a fact coincides with what really happened” (2000: 226; 2004: 178).

Yet, there is an “assertive vehemence [*véhémence assertive*]” (2000: 367; 2004: 280) in historical accounts in the sense that historians claim to render past events “as they really happened” (2000: 366; 2004: 279), according to the expression of Leopold Ranke, whom Ricoeur never tires of quoting. Narratives may not give us the “brute events,” but they do offer us a “representing” (*représentance*) that is a stand-in for what actually took place. *Représentance* is a word that Ricoeur invents—this is his Derridean *différance*-moment or -lapse—in order to name the active making of a representation. It is supposed to translate Heussi’s term

Vertretung: narratives offer an equivalent to what happened—they stand for what happened, but are not a representation as *Vorstellung* (1984: 37). “Representing” is the third and last phase of the historiographical process, after the documentary phase, which gathers the evidence and establishes the proofs, and the understanding/explanation phase, which provides the causal links and other forms of connections between facts, actions, motives, etc.⁶ The “representing” is the actual writing of the account or the literary or narrative configuration that captures the past by transporting its “historical reality” into an analogical narrative equivalent.⁷ As Ricoeur reformulates Ranke’s expression “as they really happened,” “in the analogical interpretation of the relation of taking-the-place-of or representing, the accent has shifted from ‘really’ to ‘such as.’ Better: *really* has meaning only in terms of *such as*” (1984: 35).

In this process, historians’ active representation grants narratives both an epistemological and an ontological status. On the epistemological side, narratives contribute to our knowledge of the past by presenting what has taken place, and on the ontological side, narratives give past events a form of existence for us. If narratives can play an epistemological role and contribute to our knowledge of the past, they must be more than a “version” of what has taken place or more than one account among other possible ones. Historical narratives must in some sense “be” what actually took place. Since facts and actions are not composed of words and sentences, the ontological claim of narratives must be that something “narrative-like” can be found in facts and actions. It must be that the past as made of actions, events, and experiences has a narrative structure. In this regard, Ricoeur does not hesitate to speak of life as having a pre-narrative quality or action as being a “potential narrative” (1991: 30).

Ricoeur is very conscious of the danger of a “narrativization” that would de-realize actions and events, reducing them to mere stories.⁸ The danger is real. For, the “representing” made by narrative or the stand-in that historical narratives offer of the past is “problematic” (2000: 473; 2004: 363) and, as we saw, even “an enigma,” precisely because of the analogical transfer that takes place from the past, as it has actually happened, to the representation we can make of it: “What do we mean when we say that something really happened? This is the most troublesome question that historiography puts to historical thinking” (1984: 1).

Ricoeur addresses the dangers of narrativization in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, while at the same time reiterating his conviction that events and actions only reach their full articulation once they are re-told. He puts into place a rather attractive device made of two basic components. The first one is a narrative made of semiotic means and the second is the attitude of the one who writes the narrative, what he

⁶About these three phases Ricoeur writes: “This threefold frame [*membrure*] remains the secret of historical knowledge” (2000: 323; 2004: 250).

⁷As Ricoeur says, “history is quasi-fictive once the quasi-presence of the events presented ‘before the eyes of’ the reader by a lively narrative supplements through its intuitiveness, its vividness, the elusive character of the pastness of the past” (1985: 345; 1988: 190).

⁸I have discussed this issue in Vandavelde (2008) and (2013).

calls a being-in-debt⁹ and attestation. We must accept, first, that what secures the reference or what allows us to perceive the constraints coming from the past is gone and no more and, second, that the events are not directly presentable. This means that it is the attitude of the historians of being-in-debt—and of attesting to the truth of what they say—that serves as a complement to the semiotic means of the narrative or a “supplement”—to continue the Derridean drift—to the narrative.¹⁰ The attitudes of “being in debt” and of attestation are existential, since historians who “feel a debt” toward the past bring their persona into the picture of historical rendering and manifest who they are by presenting the accounts they write of the particular events they select.¹¹ Ricoeur writes: “It is here that the coupling between being-in-debt—an ontological category—and standing for [*représentance*—an epistemological category—proves to be fruitful, to the extent that standing for raises to the epistemological level of the historiographical operation the enigma of the present representation of the absent past” (2000: 474; 2004: 364).¹²

The combination between the narrative itself and the attitude of the historian is supposed to be a remedy to the danger of complete narrativization and prevent historical narratives from being mere privileged or favorite versions of history. This combination is supposed to offer an alternative to Heidegger’s strict separation between the past as being no longer and the past as still unfolding. Ricoeur wants to keep the two aspects in some form of relation while accepting that one of the two is not directly given. Although the events as they “actually” happened are not directly accessible, they manifest themselves at the horizon of narrative representation so that they find an equivalent or stand-in in a “representing.”

The mediation provided by the narrative is dynamic in both directions; from the event to the facts and from the facts to the event. Regarding the first direction we have “traces” left by the event or the having-been of the event that points to a “counterpart” that can be felt as a “debt” and serve as a basis for correcting historical accounts. In the other direction, from the fact to the event, we have the work of the historians that attempts to “represent” what took place through a construction and their claim that the narratives they offer are about what has “really” taken place. This is the “assertive vehemence” (*véhémence assertive*) in historiography mentioned

⁹“Debt” is another notion that is central in Heidegger: *Schuld* and which is already mentioned in the third volume of *Time and Narrative*. I have discussed and differentiated these two notions of debt and attestation in Vandevelde (2013).

¹⁰Ricoeur himself characterizes *représentance* as *suppléance*, which the English translation renders as “supplementation” or “supplement” (Ricoeur 2000: 367; 2004: 567).


¹¹I have examined the ethical and political nature of attestation in Vandevelde (2015).

¹²As he explained, “to resolve this enigma, I elaborated the concept of standing-for or taking-the-place-of, signifying by this that the constructions of history are intended to be reconstructions answering to the need for a *Gegenüber*. What is more, I discerned between the function of standing-for and the *Gegenüber* that is its correlate a relation of indebtedness which assigns to the people of the present the task of repaying their due to the people of the past—to the dead” (1985: 284–285; 1988: 157). As he acknowledges, “this category of standing-for or of taking-the-place-of—reinforced by the feeling of debt—is ultimately irreducible to the category of reference” (1985: 284–285; 1988: 157).

above (2000: 367; 2004: 280), through which historians vouch for what they say and present themselves as responsible for such accounts. They attest to the truth of what they say and this attestation involves their painstaking work of a “representing” that is documented, supported by evidence, tightly knit together in a narrative that develops an argument.

Here is how we can represent Ricoeur’s apparatus to differentiate the facts from the event, on the one hand, and their referential connection, on the other. We have a correlation between what cannot be directly presented (in the left column) and what is referred to and can constrain historical accounts (in the right column): what historians establish, the facts with the qualification that they are reconstructions and thus not, “in themselves,” what happened. What connects the two and guarantees that the “facts” “refer” to the “events” is attestation as an activity of writing.

| Event | Facts |
|---|--|
| it really happened | they are recounted |
| it belongs to the past that is gone | they belong to the past that is still relevant |
| it is an ultimate referent | they are reconstructed |
| it is a counterpart (<i>vis-à-vis</i> , <i>Gegenüber</i>) | they are represented |
| it is an always receding horizon | they are propositional |



Attestation

as an activity of writing (a production or poetics of truth)

as a making-true (an “alethic” mode)

I would like to pursue this question of whether history is a continuity or a series of ruptures through the question of the connection between “facts” and “events.” As my example, I choose “events” that took place at the end of WWII belonging to “German suffering” and which went several decades before being considered “historical facts.” There seems to have been a “forgetting” of these “facts.” Ricoeur himself has treated the issue of forgetting, inserting the word itself in the title of his monumental work on *History, Memory, Forgetting*. As a matter of fact, forgetting even seems to be intrinsic to narratives: we recount by selecting what is meaningful and intelligible to us and omitting what is irrelevant. As we will discuss in the next section, German suffering during WWII had been forgotten in this sense for several decades, even by Germans. Being forgotten obviously does not mean being nonexistent. What is forgotten can be brought back to memory. Narratives play that mediating role of swinging back and forth between the meaningful and the forgotten, allowing the past to emerge and re-emerge as that tension between the “no longer” and the “still relevant.”

“German Suffering” as Fact or Event?

To illustrate “German suffering” I select two instances: the bombings of German cities by the Allies, such as Hamburg in 1943 and Dresden in 1945, when they were mostly inhabited by civilians and represented little military value, and the abuse of German women by the Red Army soldiers in Berlin as documented in the anonymous diary *A Woman in Berlin*. These destructions have been documented—recorded and archived—but it has taken a long time for them to be publicized, discussed—Ricoeur would say “represented”—and thus recognized as “historical” facts.

Regarding the first case, it was only decades after the events that people like W.G. Sebald and others presented the bombings of German cities as facts.¹³ In a book aptly titled *On the Natural History of Destruction*. Sebald states:

The [British] Royal Air Force alone dropped one million tons of bombs on enemy territory [...]. 131 towns and cities [were] attacked, some only once and some repeatedly, many were almost entirely flattened [...] about 600,000 German civilians fell victim to the air raids and 3.5 million homes were destroyed (Sebald 2003: 3).

For example, in 1943, the Royal Air Force and the US army launched the so-called “Operation Gomorrah” against Hamburg, the goal of which was “to destroy the city and reduce it as completely as possible to ashes” (Sebald 2003: 26). As Sebald describes it, with the 10,000 t of high explosive and incendiary bombs dropped on residential areas:

¹³There had been some writings about the devastation, like Heinrich Böll’s novel *The Angel was Silent*, written at the end of the 1940s, but the novel was only published in 1992. See Seebald (2003: 10). There was also Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-five*, a novel published in 1969, which indeed makes the Dresden bombing the setting of the novel and the title of a book the narrator plans to write, but never manages to write. The novel is thus also about the impossibility of writing about such an event. The narrator explains:

“I was working on my famous book about Dresden.

And somewhere in there a nice man named Seymour Lawrence gave me a three-book contract, and I said, ‘O.K., the first of the three will be my famous book about Dresden.’ The friends of Seymour Lawrence call him ‘Sam.’ And I say to Sam now: ‘Sam—here’s the book.’

It is so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds” (Vonnegut 1994: 17–18).

Vonnegut was in Dresden as a prisoner of war. As he writes in the 1994 “Preface,” the book “is a nonjudgmental expression of astonishment at what I saw and did in Dresden after it was fire-bombed so long ago, when, in the company of other prisoners of war and slave laborers who had survived the raid, I dug corpses from cellars and carried them, unidentified, their names recorded nowhere, to monumental funeral pyres” (1994:xii). About the reception of the book Vonnegut alludes to the difficulty encountered: “I have no regret about this book, which the nitwit George Will said trivialized the Holocaust” (1994: xii).

Within a few minutes huge fires were burning all over the target area, which covered some 20 square kilometers, and they merged so rapidly that only quarter of an hour after the first bombs had dropped the whole airspace was a sea of flames as far as the eye could see [...]. The fire, now rising 2000 meters into the sky, snatched oxygen to itself so violently that the air currents reached hurricane force [...]. The flames [...] rolled like a tidal wave through the streets at a speed of over 150 kilometers an hour (2003: 27).

According to Richard Overy, these raids in Hamburg killed 37,000 people, forced 900,000 people to evacuate, and destroyed 61 % of the city's houses and apartments (Overy 2014:144). In the case of Dresden in 1945, as Overy notes, the raids "were undertaken in the full knowledge that these cities were filled with civilian refugees from farther east, and that their destruction was likely to cause not just dislocation but high casualties as well" (Overy 2014: 213). 75,000 houses were destroyed, more than one third of all the houses of the city, and, as the best estimate, 25,000 people were killed after "4000 t of bombs were dropped on a single target in less than 24 h" (Overy 2014: 214). Although all this was part of the records and annals, this destruction, Sebald writes:

seems to have left scarcely a trace of pain behind in the collective consciousness [of Germany], it has been largely obliterated from the retrospective understanding of those affected, and it never played any appreciable part in the discussion of the internal constitution of our country [...]. It never became an experience capable of public decipherment (Sebald 2003: 4).

It took several decades for the "events" to be recognized as "facts" that can be publicly discussed.

The second case I bring into the discussion is the diary of a German woman relating her experiences for 2 months during the occupation of Berlin by Soviet troops in 1945. Her diary documents the daily looting and rapes, and her efforts to survive among the destruction and the repeated abuses. Her diary is one testimony to the violence inflicted upon women in times of war. According to Antony Beevor, two million German women were raped in 1945, 100,000 in Berlin alone (Beevor 2005: xx). The diary was first published anonymously in an English translation under the title *A Woman in Berlin* in 1954. As Hans Magnus Enzensberger, the editor of the finally republished book of 2002, explains, "it took five more years for the German original to find a publisher [in 1960] and even then the company, Helmut Kossodo, was not in Germany but in Switzerland" (Enzensberger 2005: xi). However, despite the fact that there was a "document" by a witness and victim, the event could not and would not become fact until much later. As reported in *The New York Times*, "the second publishing [in 1960] caused such an uproar in German society, where it was said to 'besmirch the honor of German womanhood,' that the author never revealed herself and refused to authorize further editions."¹⁴ In Enzensberger's explanation, "German readers were obviously not ready to face some uncomfortable truths, and the book was met with either hostility or silence. One of the few critics who reviewed it complained about the author's 'shameless immorality.'

¹⁴<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/28/style/28iht-aread30-berlin.6379850.html>.

German women were not supposed to talk about the reality of rape; and German men preferred not to be seen as impotent onlookers when Russians claimed their spoils of war” (Enzensberger 2005: xi).

In addition, the diary reveals many of the ambiguities of war. It was not merely a gender war, all men on one side as predators and all women on the other as victims. As the author of the diary notes, there was no Soviet official policy to organize or encourage the abuses. To the contrary, Soviet generals were appalled that their soldiers would mingle with the enemy. The author also meets and talks to several Soviet officers who are shocked by the abuse, but do not have the authority or the means to stop it. Furthermore, there were many women in the Red Army, including officers, who did not do anything against the abuses they could clearly see. As the author recounts it, when on one occasion she was being raped by two soldiers, a female Soviet officer arrived with her aides, laughed at what she saw, and walked away, joking with her aides. All this makes of the diary written by a perceptive and intelligent person a document that cannot be easily categorized and, through the ambiguities it reveals, could make about all parties rather uncomfortable. It is only in students’ circles in 1968, as Enzensberger explains, that the diary began to circulate again in photocopies. When Enzensberger tried to re-publish it in 1985, the author refused to grant permission to a second edition while she was alive. Only in 2001, after she died, could he work on a new edition, which includes passages omitted from the first edition.

There is no question now that these “terrible things” “really” happened. What is in question is the delay in the crossing over from “event” to “fact”—in Ricoeur’s terms—in its slow, painful, and political journey. There are many possible reasons and motivations that can be given for this delay. An obvious external reason is that, after the war, given the devastation the Nazis had inflicted on the rest of the world, there was not much sympathy left for the Germans. German suffering seemed like an oxymoron. There was also an internal reason. The Germans themselves were trying to rebuild their identity in shame, guilt or denial of what had happened in the previous decades. As Sebald writes about the German attitude, “there was a tacit agreement, equally binding on everyone, that the true state of material and moral ruin in which the country found itself was not to be described. The darkest aspects of the final act of destruction, as experienced by the great majority of the German population, remained under a kind of taboo like a shameful family secret, a secret that perhaps could not even be privately acknowledged” (Sebald 2003:10). Sebald quotes a Swedish journalist recounting his trip by train after the end of the war through a part of Hamburg that had been completely destroyed. In the train full of Germans, he reports that he was identified as a foreigner because he looked out through the window (Sebald 2003: 31).

These two cases illustrate quite powerfully Nietzsche’s point about the “force of the present”: history can be useful or harmful. In the latter case, forgetting can be a remedy against the poisoning of too much history or of a history that is too much to bear. These cases also illustrate Heidegger’s and Ricoeur’s view, with their

significant nuances described above, that there is no direct link between the past that is no longer and the past that is still relevant to us or between the event as what cannot give itself directly and the historical fact, which is what the narrated account represents, although Ricoeur, as we saw, grants narrative the power to produce a continuity in history. In addition, these cases also illustrate Ricoeur's view that it is only when articulated and recounted by Sebald or the published diary of an anonymous author that the event that "actually happened" gains its force and irrupts on the public stage as a possible "fact." What was controversial in all these cases did not concern the "events" themselves, which all had been experienced by many people and even described by some, but their recounting, which presented these events as historical "facts."

In some respect, these cases lend support to Ricoeur's views on *représentance* or historiographical representation, which can only become a stand-in for the events within the existential attitude of those who feel a debt toward the past and want to attest to them by daring to write reports. These "representations" by historians are, in fact, a production or a poetics of truth and, as the controversies indicate, also a politics of truth. Again, what is "political" is not that these events have been "politicized," which would still assume the precedence of something like an event that is available as such and can then later be colored through a political lens. What is political is rather the process through which something becomes a fact: the very writing of history. These cases show quite powerfully that the writing of history is in fact the making of history. Only in the 1980s and 1990s could this past be "ascribed" to the Germans and owned by the Germans so that their "suffering" became, shall we say, "legitimate."

Our two cases lend further support to Ricoeur's view that there are two absences about the past: "Absence would thus be duplicated into the absence that is targeted by the present image and the absence of things past as far as they are gone, compared to their 'having-been'" (Ricoeur 2000: 367; 2004: 280). The past as it was in its "being no more"—or the events in their negative status of being gone [*révolus*—can only be tracked by the historical facts that we can establish—their positive remaining and persistence in mattering precisely because they "have been." While in these cases the "facts" eventually emerged, as we say, the delay was not merely temporal, but a process of coming to terms with what happened. It is in this sense that the "representation" (Sebald's and the diary's publication) adduces an "increase of being" (2000: 369; 2004: 567). The narratives do not clothe the naked "having-been" of the past, but allow this past to be attested to in its having been in the manner in which it appears to us as being no more. In this manner, the "suchness" of the narrative—the "such" in the expression "such as it was"—which neither replaces nor merely represents the "actually happened"—in fact allows it to reach its public presence and thus to be accessible. In the process we also perceive the "assertive vehemence" in Sebald's work and in the publication of the diary, and even surmise the anger, frustration, and humiliation that must have consumed those authors.

Heidegger's Nagging Question

Now, the question that Heidegger could retrospectively ask Ricoeur is whether the past that is no more or the event can still function in our discourse as the ultimate referent so that our historical narratives in some sense preserve this past that is gone as what “has been” or “has passed,” what has left traces of its passage. For, the historical representation is a movement from the fact to the event, not the other way around, as Ricoeur would like it to be. The Heideggerean objection to Ricoeur can be formulated as follows: no matter how historians have a feeling of debt to the past or want to attest to the past, what they render in their narratives is an account in terms of what the event itself has made possible, whereby the event itself eludes recounting. This was Heidegger's take on Nietzsche's “history of the present.” It seems indeed that the delay inscribed in the possibility of speaking about some events is not due to the events “needing time” to be revealed. The time is rather on the side of those who reconstruct what has happened. This is Nietzsche's “force of the present.” It is the reconstruction that makes the event perceivable, but the activity of the event itself as an ultimate referent or as a corrective of narratives is measured solely in terms of facts. Strictly speaking, it is not the event that “serves” or “functions” as a referent, as Ricoeur claims. The event can only appear in terms of facts and thus, “after the fact,” as what the facts track, but the event itself thereby escapes narratives altogether. It happens, and by happening it opens a certain set of conditions—material, historical, existential—which in turn make possible some forms of articulation, such as the talk of a “natural history of destruction.” The thinking of the event that Heidegger began is the recognition that our ways of thinking have been produced in such a way that we have to accept our ungrounded position in the event and our arbitrary situation in history, precisely in order to make sense of the event, which cannot function as a referent for our discourses, not even as a constantly moving and receding horizon.

Is Nietzsche then right that history is always of the present? The delay in German suffering becoming a “fact” points to the ethical and political nature of the present of recounting history because the recounting of history is the making of history. However, Nietzsche's point about the history of the present, which seems to dismiss Ricoeur's appeal to an “ultimate referent,” also casts suspicion on Heidegger's talk about the “event” as a “beginning” of history and thus on the notion of rupture as maker of history.

In one respect it is true that the history of the present will of necessity include ruptures because the present changes. Our present in the twenty-first century is not the same present as the one of the 1950s Germany. These ruptures, though—against Heidegger—are not external to the writing of history, as if motivating them, but are themselves configured within the writing of history and by it. Against Heidegger's sometimes apocalyptic tones of “another beginning” as an event about which we can say nothing,¹⁵ Nietzsche points to new moments of beginning in the present,

¹⁵I have argued for an alternative reading of the “other beginning” in Vandavelde (2012: 175f).

in our present, so that we are not merely at the receiving end of such "events," but co-authors of them, just as Aristotle says that we are *sunaition*, partly responsible for our virtues and character. In a similar manner, we are a correlate cause of the events, along with the befalling on us of these events.¹⁶ Nietzsche's views can thus show how Ricoeur's talk of attestation can point to a possible explanation of the ambiguous status of the "event" as "referent" of historical discourse, but not presented in such a discourse.

Attestation transforms the reference to events into an activity—moral and political—by people who recount them and engage their responsibility in the narratives they give: the fact is what the narrative presents and attestation is the attitude of the historian to vouch that the fact "actually happened" as an event, and is not just what has been reconstructed. This attitude and the narratives produced guarantee the continuity between the fact and the event. But with the problem mentioned above: why is there a delay for some events? What attestation shows, although Ricoeur does not explain it, is that attitudes can change. When they do change, a rupture occurs. Now, this rupture is not at the level of the "happening," as in Heidegger, but at the level of those who attest. They may have been transformed and thus attest to the past differently. What attestation could change are not the "facts" nor the "event," but the power the events have on the victims and on ourselves.

There is in fact a correlation between what Nietzsche calls the "power of the present" and the power of the event. As mentioned above, feeling a debt to the past and attesting to the past are attitudes that manifest the vulnerability of people who feel addressed by an event or called upon to testify and attest. This vulnerability making people susceptible to be seized by the power of the event also makes their response unpredictable. This means that the power of the present is not exclusive of a power of the event, even if it is in the present that the event can speak to us. For, debt and attestation as attitudes of assenting to our vulnerability entail that, even when I speak and attest, I am already entangled in the narratives of others and told by others. As he is pressed by Sorin Antohi in their dialogue about "Memory, History, Forgiveness," Ricoeur says: "One must know how to tell one's own story as seen by others. That is to say, for me to let myself be narrated by the other. Not only for me to narrate myself otherwise (one can always do that, arrange and gather the elements in another fashion), but to agree to let mimesis be produced by the other. That is difficult." Sorin Antohi concludes: "Yet that is how notions such as forgiveness, loss and reconciliation are, it seems to me, related. They have a kind of common ground," to which Ricoeur adds: "Yes, that's it" (1985: 24).

Let me briefly illustrate that such changes are possible. A friend of mine in France, Serge Chupin, lost his father during WWII who was executed by the Nazis for his activities in the resistance movement. Several decades later my friend was consulted by the authorities of the city of Rochefort where his father lived about a street to be named after his father and a plaque dedicated to his memory. After

¹⁶See Ricoeur (1990: 115–116; 1992: 94).

seeing the blueprint of the plaque, the son told them: “The monument must say ‘executed by the Nazis,’ not ‘executed by the Germans.’”¹⁷ This distinction made by someone who lost his father when he was a little child, who is thus a victim too, in one obvious sense, does not change the “facts”—his dad was executed by Nazi soldiers—but in another existential sense it changes how the “event” bears upon him and other French people, as well as, by association, upon the Germans. There is in this distinction a certain forgiveness—the Nazis are not the Germans—and thus a certain rupture in the unfolding of history: what the Nazis did will not cause a reaction toward the Germans. Against Heidegger’s understanding of the event but corresponding with Ricoeur’s views of it, this rupture is within the understanding of the event, not outside of it. In the case I mentioned, the monument dedicated to my friend’s father will not be merely part of monumental history—as a mausoleum to the past—nor antiquarian history—as if consumed by the past—nor critical history—as if condemning the past—but a liberation and a beginning so that my friend and other French people can work with Germans, as they do, to preserve the memory of the past, but in a living sense and about a past that has become now common to both French and Germans as their, now, shared collective memory in a new community.

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¹⁷I am thankful to Serge Chupin for sharing this story with me. The plaque says: “Avenue Maurice Chupin (1918–1943) Mort pour la France Fusillé par les nazis le 3 septembre 1943.”

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Part IV
Challenges and Future Directions for a
Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The Conflict of Hermeneutics

Marc de Launay

Understanding one thing and being mistaken about this very same thing are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Kafka, The Trial

Abstract Ricoeur's conception of history shows a permanent hesitation between two philosophies of interpretation: Gadamer's hermeneutics and Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, hermeneutics as a philosophy and hermeneutics as a method. I provide an example of Biblical interpretation (*Genesis 3*) to show the consequences of this hesitation.

Keywords Hermeneutics • Bible • Myth • Theory of history

Paul Ricoeur's opening address at the colloquium devoted to him in November 1987 in Grenada entitled "Self-understanding and History"¹ aimed from the outset at combining a presentation of his own approach and reflections on the level of "philosophical anthropology". By taking up the history of his own works to indicate their themes and considerations, Ricoeur notes, undoubtedly due to the initial pressure of his "dual biblical and Greek culture", that a certain "style [...] remained unchanged throughout my development: I always find myself fighting on two fronts, or reconciling recalcitrant opponents to dialogue"; and he sees in this "style of incomplete mediation between rival positions" the expression of a "constraint arising from the very history" of modern philosophy: "We all belong [...] to the post-Hegelian era of thought and we all carry out, in our own way, the difficult grieving process with respect to the system." This grief, in turn, implies that the reflective process is henceforth "the great detour [...] via all the works that the history of our culture has deposited in our collective memory" while noting the impossibility "of total reflection by means of total mediation, as is the case with Hegel."

¹This conference has recently become available to the public in French ("Autocompréhension et histoire") thanks to the work done by the Fonds Ricoeur.

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Indeed, Ricœur's interest in the question of history was already manifested in the early 1950s, as indicated by the following lines written at the conclusion of a 1953 article – “The History of Philosophy and the Unity of Truth” –, in a volume in honor of Karl Jaspers: “History wishes to be objective but it cannot. [...] It wishes to make past events contemporary, but it must at the same time restore the distance and depth of historical remoteness” (Ricœur 1965: 76). This interest never waned, as can be seen in *Time and Narrative*, *From Text to Action*, and *Memory, History, Forgetting*. One can thus see that, in being careful not to “dissociate understanding and explaining”, and even contesting the distinction formerly drawn by Windelband between explaining – specific approaches to “natural science” – and understanding – the province of “the sciences of the mind” –, Ricœur sought to show that interpretation “consists precisely in alternating stages of understanding with stages of explaining along a ‘unique hermeneutic axis’”.² So much so that the “theory of history” becomes “the most remarkable illustration of combination [...] between understanding a web of events in a single sequence and explaining through generalities.” One will note as well that the use of the expression “theory of history” is not the result of modest caution, but very much a deliberate choice that endorses a break from what could have been the ambitions of a “philosophy of history”, invariably arousing mistrust and rejection from historians, but also philosophical criticism when it questions the conceptions of time that underpin, if not a desire to control, at least the efforts of subsumption.³

It is thus consistent with his overall approach that in *Time and Narrative III* Ricœur places, just after chapter 9 (“Should We Renounce Hegel?”), the short study that he devotes to Reinhardt Koselleck. And it seems that “the work of mourning” we are confronted with, since we are no longer thinking “according to Hegel, but after Hegel”, is made all the more difficult when the last note in chapter 9 admits to adopt a position “close to Gadamer’s” where Ricœur indicates that he “abandons Hegel rather than conquering him through criticism” (Ricœur 1988: 324). This note introduces an important reservation in so far as its precaution extends to the study of Koselleck who is known to have made a point of opposing Gadamer directly by questioning his vision of hermeneutics in *Truth and Method*.⁴ Indeed, from the outset, Koselleck situates his research within the framework of a theory of history that would be “the theory of the conditions of the possibility of history” (Koselleck 2000: 99). But more importantly, this reservation finally betrays a more fundamental hesitation between two hermeneutics: one that can be traced back to Schleiermacher and the other that goes back to Heidegger and Gadamer, even

²Ricœur wrote in a conference that took place in Budapest in March 2003, and published in a special edition of the review *Esprit*, March–April 2006, “La Pensée Ricœur”, p. 21. “Interpretation is not a stage separate from the whole historical process”.

³This is what Eric Vigne (2006: 27) opportunely noted in his excellent essay on “Agreements and Disagreements with Historians.”

⁴Alexandre Escudier clearly showed this in his paper, “The hermeneutics of the historical condition according to Paul Ricœur”, presented during a study day devoted to *Time and Narrative* organised at the École normale supérieure, on June 22, (published in *Études philosophiques*, 2008).

though Ricœur does not seem to think along these lines when he lists, in his 1987 conference in Grenada, the great names of this tradition. He cites “Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer” all together in evoking the “graft of hermeneutics [...] onto phenomenology” whose Husserlian provenance stands in a lineage that features Kant prominently. In the final note of Chapter 9 in *Time and Narrative III*, his agreement with Gadamer confirms the sentence that begins the second part of *Truth and Method*: “If we are to follow Hegel rather than Schleiermacher, the history of hermeneutics must place its emphases quite differently” (Gadamer 2004: 175). Notwithstanding this hesitation, Ricœur commences Chapter 10 by replying in the affirmative to the question he asks at the outset – “Having left Hegel behind, can we still claim to think about history and the time of history?” (Ricœur 1988: 207). He advocates the possibility of exploring the path of an “open-ended, incomplete, imperfect *mediation*” from which the hope (or nostalgia?) for a totality where “reason in history and its reality would coincide” would be completely eliminated (*Ibid.*). At the same time, it would open reflection not only on to the domain of the discipline of history such as it can conceive itself without adopting necessarily an overarching position, but also to the domain of the categories of human action through history. It is thus to allow for the passage to the level of anthropology, even if it is not necessarily a question of identifying invariants *in fine*, as Habermas tried to do by defining “work” and “interaction”. It is no surprise that Ricœur encounters the views of Reinhart Koselleck who also fights against the idea of “total history”: “Between intra-human social events, and the words that accompany or comment on these events, there is an endlessly changing gap that disallows any ‘total history’. History is accomplished by anticipating the unaccomplished, and any adequate interpretation of history has therefore to renounce totality” (Koselleck 2006: 13). Koselleck, as we know, was oriented towards historical semantics and “conceptual” history, but he did not focus on them to the detriment of social history: “History cannot be reduced to the way in which it is grasped conceptually, no more than it is thinkable without this conceptual standpoint” (*Ibid.*).

To renounce Hegel and to renounce the mirage of a perfect mediation is at the same time to accept to take into consideration the complexity of the connections between the expectations oriented towards the future and the interpretations of the past. Koselleck proposes the notions of “field of experience” and “horizon of expectation”, a choice that Ricœur deems “very judicious and particularly illuminating” (Ricœur 1988: 207) from the point of view of both terminology as much as from a theoretical reflection on history. But it should also be noted that Koselleck’s notion of “experience” is derived directly from the meaning given to the word by Kant, which is to say that it is a second level of synthesis taken from perception (itself a receptivity on a second level) and the concept (a spontaneity on a second level), thanks to the imagination: historical experience is not simply what happens to us and what we have lived through with a greater or lesser proximity to events. It is work on something that has happened to us through the use of a method. The field of experience is thus, at the outset, a notion that integrates a portion of activity, that does not deal with everything that affects our passivity without interposing a way of thematizing events. Therefore, there is not, on the one hand, a history of method

and, on the other, a history of experience, but always a synthesis based on the mutations of experience and those of method:

Indeed, real transformations are much less important than the narrative of subjective and singular surprises of the people concerned would have us suppose. Now methods give us the means to rethink them, and it's the change in method that allows us to include new experience and that makes it transposable. (Koselleck 2000: 66)

This is the case, *a fortiori*, when the question is treated from a historiographical point of view since it is then necessary to establish the conditions that allow for “narrative” or “emplotment”, that is to say, those belonging to an intersubjectivity that refuses the death of the individual who would disappear behind the “life” of structures. Nevertheless, Ricœur does not lead his discussion in this direction, but focuses on one of the applications of interconnectedness between the field of experience and the horizon of expectation: the way in which the modern era conceives its relationship with time through the idea of novelty, progress and, finally, control over the course of history. What is essential, from Koselleck’s point of view, is the logic that governs how the two poles are articulated, that of experience and that of expectation: the less the field of experience is limited, the more the horizon of expectation will be determined, and vice versa. To deny the past by concluding that we have nothing to expect from it, is to overvalue the future in relation to expectations that no longer owe anything, and no longer want to owe anything to the past, all the more so since history increasingly seems to be under the control of the *homines novi* arising in this present whose only value is measured by its ability to accelerate; hence “demands regarding the future have never ceased to grow” in so far as “individual time is experienced as a new temporality, as ‘modern time’” (Koselleck 1985: xxiv). This is plain to see. Not only are the fields of experience and the horizons of expectation modified over the course of history, but more essentially, how they are linked. From this point of view, the “modern” conception energizes time itself by turning it into a “new time”, energizing heavily by history, which implies no longer seeing in the present anything but a “time of transition between the shadows of the past and the light of the future” (Ricœur 1988: 210 *sq.*). As the corollary of this mutation in the articulation between the field of experience and the horizon of expectation, the idea of progress goes hand in hand with the feeling of an increasing acceleration of historical time, and, a proportional expiration of tradition and its authority. Robespierre’s speech on May 10th, 1793 provides one example among others: “The progress of human reason has prepared this great revolution and you, you have the specific task of accelerating this work.” What he calls the “true mission” whose “time has come” consists precisely in precipitating the new time – to the contrary of the entire long tradition, broken by the Reformation, but also by Bodin’s notions,⁵ in which the Church played the role of a *katechon* in line with the Second Epistle of

⁵For Bodin, sacred history, human history and the history of nature are distinct; the traditional eschatology is neutralised as the end of time is nothing more than a date in the cosmos, whereas human history, uncoupled from history, no longer has an ascribable goal; it is a domain for probabilities open to understanding and human action.

Paul to the Thessalonians (2, 6) –, and, all the more deliberately so, history is henceforth considered as something made by humans, first by those who have understood the meaning of this mission, that is, by the particularly enlightened *avant-garde* of the revolutionaries. The horizon of expectation filled with future utopias, by the projected future, is accompanied by a field of experience pervaded by rejection and, therefore, by a present identified with an imminent crisis.

Now it is precisely one of “Gadamer’s theses to maintain that history is achieved above and beyond men, with no concern for their views” (Koselleck 2000: 115). In this way, Koselleck simply reminds us of the main axes of this particular hermeneutics, and emphasizes that “in his discussion with Habermas and Apel, he goes so far as to insist on the inaccessible nature of an inherent meaning in history” (Koselleck 2000: 114), a meaning imposed on every act of understanding since history would remain beyond every hermeneutic effort. In the field of history, Gadamer simply extends what he has already said about texts: “not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author” (Gadamer 2004: 296). It has been said that Ricœur makes no secret of his agreement with Apel and Habermas as to the fact that actual history was incumbent upon the responsibility of those who turned their backs on the mirages of the totality and also of his attachment to a philosophical lineage imposing on the present a way of dealing with the problems of history that moves away from the Gadamerian conception: the decision that seeks to prevent “the horizon of expectation from fleeing” and seeks to replace the utopian drift with “intermediary projects within the reach of action” thereby leads back “from Hegel to Kant, in that post-Hegelian Kantian style *I favor*. Like Kant, I hold that every expectation must be a hope for humanity as a whole” (Ricœur 1988: 215). And nevertheless, even after the farewell to Hegel, even by apparently choosing a Kantian perspective, Ricœur does not really give up Gadamer nor a hermeneutics that echoes a founding Revelation *par excellence* of the true tradition. This ecumenism is in fact impracticable, and to opt for Koselleck would imply turning one’s back on Gadamer.

If we place ourselves squarely in the field of hermeneutics, the question is no longer, generally speaking, that of the conception of history underpinning the interpretation of all sorts of phenomena, but the one that we adopt in relation to texts. For the division is between a hermeneutic tradition of Kantian origin, like Schleiermacher’s, and a more Hegelian one, in which we find Gadamer. The presupposition of Schleiermacher’s general hermeneutics is that the source of meaning is not only contemporary to texts, but, above all, that it is, for the most part, situated there. In other words, meaning circulates around the composition of texts (that is to say what they respond to and what they attempt to reinforce or modify, as well as what they wish to innovate) and is at the very center of their organization. Notwithstanding Ricœur’s requirement that was just mentioned, this presupposition is however far from being the one that he recognizes elsewhere: “[...] in all its uses, discourse seeks to bring into language an experience, a way of living and of Being-in-the-world which precedes it and which demands to be said” (Ricœur 1991: 19). He admits to a “conviction” that originates, as he says, from Heidegger and Gadamer, that “there is always a *Being-demanding-to-be said* that precedes our actual saying” (Ricœur 1991: 19). This conviction, as well as the debt it is based on, attests to

Ricœur's long allegiance from 1968 to a heritage he never disowned when he claimed that Heidegger's merit was to have identified "a dimension of language that is anterior to subjective intention and, even more so, to the structures of language", to the extent that the word would be "the transition from speech addressed to us to our own speech" (Ricœur et al. 1971: 316). What Ricœur refers to when speaking about a form of *saying* that precedes all *speech* and even all languages, is quite obviously the Revelation, but he wanted to give it a status that was at least as originary as Heideggerian being. He structured his reflections on language in three parts in order to show that structural analysis only envisaged "the composition of its form", that the "phenomenology of speech" was attached to the intentions of human language, and that it was thus necessary to open onto an "ontology of discourse" where language (in general) was understood as "a way of being" (Ricœur et al. 1971: 304).⁶ The source of meaning, and therefore that of a semiotic system and process in contrast with all languages, has an absolutely unique position: it is anterior to all discourse, to all human expression, and therefore to all texts. The most obvious of all paradoxes is precisely that this discourse on the Revelation is only possible through the interpretation of a text, whether it be Genesis 9, Exodus 20 or St John 1, or even St Luke 12, 49–51, and St Paul's Epistles. Almost ten years later, in his long essay on the Revelation, and although he recognizes, right from the outset, the historical nature of this Revelation (Ricœur 1980: 90), Ricœur confirms what he thinks about texts in general: "By this I mean that what is finally to be understood in a text is not the author or his presumed intention, nor is it the immanent structure of the text, but rather the sort of world intended beyond the text as its reference" (Ricœur 1980: 100). This is why texts seem to follow secondary structures in relation to the understanding of their meaning, structures that do not appear to owe much to an author. In reality, the author would be the vehicle for a "meaning" that goes beyond and eludes the author. The status of the author, which guarantees the possibility of reconstructing intelligibility for another generation, based on the structures of what has been written, would play no role in the attempts at composition from which what we read proceeds. For Ricœur, at least from this perspective which was also his own, the text would be in a sense the "trace" of an original "*saying*" and in a sense immemorial, intended, in any case, for us as listeners who are never able to decipher correctly this original oversaturation of meaning. Likewise, for Heidegger, knowledge is only one modality of existence among others. Just as lived experience confronts the "world" in an always prereflexive mode that only presents itself through referential structures that do not first solicit a cognitive grasp, so too the knowledge of the author, of the structures of the text, and of the historical context of its composition are all considered secondary in relation to what Ricœur calls the poetic fonction that incarnates "a concept of truth that escapes the definition by adequation [...] here, truth no longer means verification but manifestation, i.e., *letting be* what shows itself" (Ricœur 1980: 102). The consequence for hermeneutics is immediate. For it is no longer a question of replying to an author and his

⁶ We will leave aside the specific question of justifying the precedence of the Revelation in relation to being: as it is obviously impossible from a Heideggerian point of view.

texts by knowing how the author himself conceived his works in response to a particular problem situated in a particular context, how he composed them to shine light on a particular solution or to establish a particular break with tradition, it is a matter of responding to the “meaning and to the reference of the work”, thereby placing oneself at a “*historical*” level, as Heidegger understands this when he speaks about “translation” *sive* (in his essay on the Anaximander Fragment and in *What is Thinking?*) the very activity of thought. Even if one wants to substitute the “world of the work” for the intentions of the author, and even if it is legitimate to seek to reject both an aesthetics of production and an aesthetics of reception, it is impossible to totally disregard the art of textual composition and style. This is precisely what sets works apart historically and allows interpretation to understand what makes them unique. If the “meaning” were originary and were spread historically through texts that do nothing other than express it without being able to produce it, interpreting would then consist of identifying the *same* through a diversity of expression that would be reduced to be merely contingent. The condition for the possibility of texts is what gets denied to the benefit of a history of transmission.

Ways of interpreting can thus be characterized according to one’s conception of the sources of meaning, and in this respect Ricœur’s ecumenical intention seems impossible to maintain (Berner 2013: 73 and 351). Three modalities appear: either meaning is considered as being external to the text, regardless of whether it is radically anterior or posterior, or radically other than textual; or meaning results from a brief and transitory encounter between the author and the text, the interpreter and the original text, and thus becomes blurry just as it is detected, forever fugitive and always relative; or it results essentially from texts, that is to say from a complex process mixing the textual decisions of the author taken from the heart of a tradition that one receives passively like a destiny – and that one seeks to strengthen or weaken by anticipating the effects that are produced by what one writes. These three modalities correspond to three conceptions of historical time. In the first case, meaning is already given, and its origin will determine the flow of history that develops from it (the same goes for the conception that sees meaning result from an end of history or eschatology). From this point of view, interpretation is vested with the eminent role of rediscovering in all texts the traces of the same perennial meaning that they can only express imperfectly, and to which they all finally refer. The history of thought, which is no longer a history, is punctuated by major interpretative shifts that mark the successive stages of a decline and a forgetting of the original meaning. Formulating this conception requires being placed in a unique position for enunciation where one gives oneself the authority that alone allows one, without contradiction, to claim that one knows the original meaning and to be situated far away, temporally speaking, from this origin, that is, even while being immersed in a universe where this meaning is disfigured. The second modality is a skeptical one. It only aims at making do with isolated effects of meaning, and meaning arises from this or that encounter between a text and its interpreter. Events take precedence over tendencies; everything has to be repeated constantly; no orientation appears in the brilliance of gifted individualities interpreting by reconstructing what they want to see in texts which no longer appear relevant in their time, but are offered on a whim,

or to meet the economic needs of the moment. Meaning is neither external nor internal; it is one of the effects of an improvised convergence; it appears in the present since no interpretation is a precondition of the hermeneutic process. The third modality grants priority to texts and works that it recognizes as the true matrices of meaning produced by strictly textual and literary means. From this point of view, a text does not have its meaning as if it were an external attribute identifiable among others. In that sense, it is nothing but a device. Authors, however, remain caught up in a tradition they are completely aware of, and they seek to situate themselves in relation to this tradition by fulfilling in their present time a complex articulation between the experiences that history provides them with and the expectations that they seek to anticipate. From this standpoint, hermeneutics is based on an interpretation of what historical gaps were produced by the texts it interprets, and this is what it seeks to do without any illusion about historical or cultural discrepancies. It forbids any overarching point of view of the totality of history, any viewpoint that would refuse a future to meaning, but it admits that, in spite of their historical or cultural distance, in spite of the historical nature of the meaning produced by these texts, they can deliver the meaning of experience to experience. Because they repeat the approach that works with linguistic instruments in order to produce an intervention in history, to take part in the heart of a culture, to adopt a position in a context, and even if they do this in very different ways, they never cease to inform us about the way they participate, like us, in the dynamics and dialectics of cultural forms.

The conflict of hermeneutics is not new, and the dividing line that has just been traced is not fundamentally distinct from the one that was established two centuries ago. In the case of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics: "Any individual, whose discourse can become an object, works on himself or determines how best to think in a particular way. It is precisely from here that arises the enrichment of language with new objects and new power that always stem from from the linguistic activity of unique men" (Schleiermacher 2012: 75). From this point of view, hermeneutics was considered "general" precisely because the very same method remained valid for grasping what is *individual*. When he speaks of "grammar", it is precisely to object to the way writers dismiss it (such is the "psychological" or "technical" approach) by introducing the innovations of their "style". In short, the object of interpretation is what is created from an original aspect of the material so that it is indeed a phenomenon, but unique, an efficient fusion of matter and form – and accepted as such by one's contemporaries. Opposed to that particular form of hermeneutics during Schleiermacher's lifetime, was the conception of the great philologist August Böckh who never ceased to claim he was following his teacher while steadfastly betraying his thought. Böckh advocates, in his words, for the "knowledge of the known", that is, for the knowledge of what one knows in advance to represent a necessary stage in the development of culture, that is already dealt with even before approaching the texts that are representative of this stage. This is the position traditionally adopted by the type of universal hermeneutics that Spinoza puts into practice in his *Theologico-Political Treatise* on the Bible. The criterion for evaluation is then "universal reason" that traces the departure that can be made in texts from what would be admissible and pertinent in the light of such reasoning and

what, on the contrary, would result from the contingent, folklore or myth. The contemporaneity of reason adjudicates, each time, what one must retain and maintain there. But the price required by the “knowledge of the known” becomes exorbitant if it requires “reproducing the other as being one’s own and no longer external” (Böckh 1886: 19 *sq.*), such that what is historical and particular (Wismann 1997: 75 *sq.*) is eliminated from understanding. Schleiermacher’s starting point is the lack of understanding as well as the desire to construct understanding point by point (Schleiermacher 2012: 127). Böckh’s starting point is the presupposition according to which the “known” is knowable precisely because every individual, contingent, historical or stylistic aspect is reduced straight away to the idea, the concept, or the general representation.⁷ What is individual is the inevitable slag resulting from the immersion of an idea in the sensible. For, it is only a matter of reconstructing the idea, which, if we wish to grasp it correctly, logically entails removing the contingencies of its incarnation from it. The particularities of the manifold are thereby subsumed by the concept, and this is what prevents one from descending to the material level of a text in order to discover its singularities, most of which proceed from work on the material, especially in the case of poetry – especially, but not exclusively, since it would be equally erroneous to refuse from the outset the aesthetic dimension of other literary genres. Even when Böckh recognizes the historical dimension of ancient linguistic works, it is for the sake of situating this historicity in a prior representation of what universal history must be and thus in the “exact” place this realization of spirit must occupy.⁸

The theoretical controversy that opposes a form of hermeneutics as method with hermeneutics in a wider sense as “philosophy” must also be settled in the field of actual interpretations. One example, provided by Ricoeur’s text on original sin, that is republished in *The Conflict of Interpretations* and provides a suitable testing ground.

It is remarkable that all the attempts mentioned by Ricoeur in this study at explaining “original” sin recognize the biblical source as a primary reference, but not one of them seeks to explore the text from which Christianity and the heresies such as that it fought against, such as gnosticism, proceed. Ricoeur clearly showed that the notion of original sin resulted from these struggles rather than preceding them, even if the question of evil was their common denominator. But when it comes to dealing with Genesis 3, he disqualifies the outset, the value of this text by considering it first of all as a “narrative” and then as a product that does not go beyond the level of myth. He even goes as far as distinguishing between “mythical symbols full of imagery” and “rational symbols”. Now this distinction cannot be

⁷Although Böckh read Humboldt, it is difficult to assert, like B. Bravo (1968, 93), that he borrowed from him his conception of “the driving forces in history” or the “tasks of the historian”, as Humboldt maintains the Kantian distinction between the two “causalities”, and above all, asserts that the productions of the mind result from a synthesis that is always *individual*.

⁸Peter Szondi defended the opposite perspective by claiming that literary hermeneutics is not a specialised hermeneutics, but a “theory of interpretation that would reconcile philology and aesthetics” (1989: 18).

maintained for long from a strictly methodological point of view. Indeed, in the “First Introduction” to the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant defines the three powers of the mind: the ability to know, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and finally, the ability to desire. For each of these there is a corresponding faculty of the mind: understanding, the faculty of judgment, and, as far as reason is concerned, the ability to desire whose guiding principle is purposiveness. Kant uses the word “symbol” when it is a question of correlative intuitions for the *ideas of reason*. The parallel with schematization follows from this because one cannot analyze as such the link that is created between the idea and the intuition, no more than one can do so when dealing with intuitions of the pure concepts of understanding. Kant’s example, as we know, is that of a monarchic State compared to a windmill. This analogical representation is said to be “symbolic” in a context where this word is equivalent to “metaphorical” and designates an indirect presentation of a concept that proceeds by analogy: “Because there is in fact no resemblance between a despotic state and a mill, but there is indeed one between rules governing reflection on the two of them and their causality” (Kant 1968: 352). Kant notes that language is full of these words that are indirect presentations based on analogy, and that, even more so, they are predominant in relation to concepts as such that remain restricted to the limits imposed by rules stemming from schematism. The whole interest of this justification of aesthetic judgement – “beauty is the symbol of morality” – consists in underlining both the subjective and intersubjective nature of this judgment, and this intersubjectivity, even in the trivial form of a spontaneous reaction toward a natural spectacle or a work, reveals that sensible reception is not the purpose of the aesthetic object, but that it refers to a deeper root where the theoretical and practical faculties are linked in a way that is common to everyone and yet, unknown (Kant 1968: 353). The opposition between mythical “symbols full of images” and “rational symbols” cannot therefore be valid: there is as much rationality at work in “mythical” symbolization as there are images (or metaphors) in the so-called rational symbols. What they have in common is precisely their material: language. This is why it is essential to beware of giving a ruling too quickly on the nature of the biblical text dealing with “the fall” or “sin”, especially when these words – and this should be a warning to us – are not mentioned there.

If it is possible to reconstruct a thematic isotope that goes from St Paul to St Augustine including the Manicheans and the Gnostics, then from Augustine to the Council of Trent, the same does not apply if one seeks to justify a true filiation between Genesis 3 and Romans 5. First of all, for simple methodological reasons, “typology” or figuralism – a medieval form of proof – does not stand up to rational scrutiny; indeed, the continuity between the Pentateuch and the Gospels cannot be upheld, from a historian’s point of view, by a vision of history that distributes them according to schema forged after the fact where one is assigned the function of a sign or indication, while the other has the role of fulfillment or accomplishment, when functions and roles are only distributed on the basis of a self-justification that is inherent to the interests of legitimation of the Gospels. Next, St Paul’s method of interpreting the Torah is a form of allegory that makes light of the letter of the text, on the pretext that the letter would “kill” it, while only the “spirit” that interprets it

is said to be alive. Finally, the idea of retribution is so decisive when it comes to justifying the incarnation and building from it the function of redemption. But this is in no way present in Genesis 3 or in the Pentateuch generally since the mediating instance is no longer a person shrouded in a transcendent essence, but the Law itself and its observance. It alone, as shown in the Book of Job, is never enough to ensure a salvation.

Genesis 3 is introduced as a “narrative”, or rather as a story, but also a semiotic game that immediately intertwines a different reading system with diegesis and that sets apart its apparently narrative nature in order to give rise to a reflective counterpoint. Indeed *adam* (this is not a proper noun yet) and his companion, *isha* (who too has no name yet) are “naked” and are not ashamed of their state, while the serpent, personified as in the narrative tradition of legends, is said to be the most “cunning” of animals. Now the consonants of the word in Hebrew for nudity, *haroum*, are the same as the adjective that means cunning (*haroum*). In other words, the narrative begins with a traditional situation found in tales: the protagonists were in this situation, and each one is characterized by a supposedly specific attribute. This presentation also stages an opposition between the two resources of language – the semantic and semiotic registers – that constitute its underlying force. If “nakedness” without shame connotes a form of innocence, this is immediately made relative by its proximity to “cunning”, and the latter, at first dramatically underlined, is thereby reduced to no more than naïve ingenuity. The translations in western languages have not taken care to maintain this opposition as part of the “meaning”, and succumb to a sort of narrative realism that, in a way, takes the story at face value and whose counterpart would be the universalising allegorization. Another purely textual indication is found in the use made of the name of God who has just been introduced in dual form *Yahweh-Elohim* (*Gen.* 2:4). When the serpent speaks, he can never make use of this dual form which only reappears in *Gen.* 3:8. Its function is clearly indicated by its subsequent selective uses as a subject: its connotation designates an open future that is thus offered first to humanity, then to the descendants of Enoch (*Gen.* 5: 26), therefore to Noah, and consequently to his son Shem (unlike Ham who is damned, and Japheth who is blessed only in the name of Elohim – *Gen.* 9:27), the forefather of Abraham and the Jewish people, the first recipient of the promise. Elohim is a name used for God that can be invoked by everyone, but this can lead to a possible confusion with the other divinities. The existence of other nations is included in the alliance with Noah and considered just, inasmuch as they are the descendants of Japheth and thereby also recognize this first alliance. The “serpent” thus has no real future, as is shown by his “punishment” in *Gen.* 3:14. He was only able to be chosen as a protagonist in a tale only in the mythical perspective where a polymorphism reigns that will be put to an end – the serpent has no other future than to remain what he is: a reptile. The fact that he is able to speak is a concession to this mythical universe that the “narrative” intends to create only in order to better denounce it by developing for the reader a sort of lesson in discursive postures at the end of which animals can no longer speak, even though it was common practice and perfectly “logical” in mythical tales.

The divine prohibition was solely about eating the “fruit from the tree of good and evil” – and not about *the* good and *the* evil. This prohibition does not concern the miraculous substances contained *materialiter* in the “fruit” of a miraculous “tree” placed right at the center of the Garden of Eden. In other words, the prohibition concerns ingesting something that comes from a fundamental difference of an ethical nature: it is forbidden to want to appropriate the source of the differentiation between good and evil, because this differentiation *is precisely not of a concrete or material nature, but emerged from an abstract or transcendental register*. The other tree, the tree of “life”, was not the object of an initial prohibition, which allows us to understand that only the transgression of the first prohibition leads to the desire to violate the second. It is therefore forbidden to appropriate the differentiation between good and evil, because this appropriation, in so far as it takes place in a regressive way – which the story presents us as the choice that human beings cannot fail to make – will immediately lead to a desire for eternity. Whosoever imagines that he masters the distinction between good and evil believes he is above norms and refuses to accept the common fate of living a finite life where only a moral responsibility can be effective. Eternal life logically means the complete dissolution of moral responsibility. Indeed, if I have all eternity, I am committed to no particular choice, and I have *all the time* to change my choices indefinitely, as they are reduced to being both momentary and permanent. Death, the promised punishment, will not strike the protagonists, contrary to the still naïve fear expressed by *isha* when she answers the tempting serpent: death is a component of human life or its “condition”; it is a logical necessity from the point of view of the foundation of an ethics. It is not a sentence imposed as a punishment immediately following the breaking of a law, but a given, whose role in the human condition must be justified, which the text will do in a striking way in Gen. 3, 20: when God reminds us that *adam* (“male and female”, Gen. 1:27), given *his name*, “earthly”, will return to the dust from which he is, in part, derived. This *adam* does not fear to argue that, faced with this mortal term, he has his own resources at his disposal: to give a name to *isha* so that it becomes a symbol for what is possible for human beings. Eve, Hava, carries a name that means the possible future for humanity and thus that designates the unique link only human beings can forge between time and meaning, thanks to a distinct power, namely, the capacity to symbolize. It is worth remembering that, unlike many cosmogonies, Genesis does not attribute the creation of language to God nor that of time (which is not personified anywhere, unlike Chronos, for example), but leaves time and language presupposed by the very fact of dealing with the question of origins.⁹

What then is precisely the “sin” committed by *isha* and endorsed *taciter* by *adam*? The text puts in place a drama to be “seen”. And the irony that constantly underlies it comes from the immediate reference to divine “sight” that is similar to

⁹ Cf. Gen. 1, 22; 1, 28; but also, the succession of divine “words” (“God said...”), the succession of “days”, and the complex problematics of the seventh day, that is actual duration, but deprived of morning and evening. As for language, Gen. 2, 19, in particular, opens the whole sequence of events about the necessary relationship with others right up to the naming of *isha*.

a carefully distributed value judgment given that two things, heaven and man, are not said to be good during the unfolding of the “creation”. The abstention of a divine judgment about heaven and man is equivalent to a refusal of the dominant representation in cosmogonies where, of course, heaven is taken as the model that man will have either to imitate or at least seek to understand as the height of harmony, justice, and truth – the image chosen by Plato to connote the good is obviously the sun. The persuasive argument of the serpent consists in promising that the eyes of the human couple will be opened: they will see what the gods see, and thereby become equal to them. *Isha* does not value the fruit of the tree in absolute terms, as God does in judging what he has created, but solely in relation to her own needs or her own expectations: good to eat, pleasant to look at, worthy of being contemplated. *Isha* says nothing, does not deliberate, does not hesitate, and easily confuses various modalities of representation (utility, pleasure, fascination) with those of reflection. The irony is also extended by the conclusion of the tale where the appropriation of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was supposed “to open one’s eyes”, but ends with the protagonists’ awareness of their nakedness, which they are now ashamed of. Their eyes are opened to the most trivial of findings, the lowest “knowledge”, a pitiful return to the initial situation: they therefore know nothing more, and the serpent with his ruse – the last resort of the myth – was unable to keep the slightest promise: the mythical universe is accused of being sterile. Representation, exclusively visual representation, does not confer any additional faculty; it does not lead to divine knowledge. The feeling of shame is henceforth the only benefit gained from this transgression: they did not know that their bodies were all they had, and that any separation from the body they however never cease to be, has in no way been abolished by their subjection to the register of appearance. Knowing the difference between good and evil does not have any relation to the empirical domain of representation; it requires a passage through the formal register of reflection, through the distance created by abstraction that forbids linking the slightest rule of action to an empirical vision. Moreover, what is denounced in particular in this episode as a sin, that does not really deserve punishment but a pure and simple return to the human condition in its most banal and general form, is the fact that knowledge of the difference between good and evil can be understood on the archaic level of appropriation by manducation: ingesting the body of the enemy who is prized or feared for his formidable or admirable qualities. Eating animals in order to acquire their envied or imaginary achievements is what points back to a universe governed by myth. Now the lesson of this episode is precisely to learn how to leave that magical, polymorphic, formidable but equally delightful world, where serpents speak and fruit can confer divinity. Moral knowledge is not acquired by passively consuming an image of the source of norms, but by acting and by reflecting, within the complexity of practice that never conforms to a “textbook case”, on how to stay faithful to the rules that one has understood to be in the interest of everyone at the end of a reflection, a deliberation. This sin has nothing to do with “original” sin, except that we all are constantly guilty of it because it is part of our condition to trust appearances and our empirical representations of them – as evidenced by numerous forms of stereotypes and prejudices. There is nothing hereditary

about original sin, even if the error of judgment is transmitted from generation to generation just like what requires us to take up things each time *ab ovo* – we do not control historical time, and from that point of view, there is no constant or cumulative progress – any child can mischievously remind us that, like science, education is an endless task, because it too is an incomplete whole.¹⁰

Another conception of history is thus seen to emerge from the first pages of Genesis. While the Pauline revolution put an end to the cyclical conception of time by opening the era of universal history marked with the apostolic rhythm of pagan conversion, and oriented towards its ultimate stage, Judgment and Redemption that ultimately abolish it, the revolution within the Pentateuch is different, even if it too puts an end to a mythical conception of circular time. It is, indeed, the first formulation of an open history, with no final promise, without apostolic universality, as it allows for the differences between nations, a strictly human history without magic, that unambiguously forbids all theodicy. It is above all an essential transition between *mythos* and *logos* that is contemporary to the study of myth by Hesiod in his *Theogony*. In his article on myth written for the *Encyclopaedia Universalis* (Ricœur 1991: 253), Ricœur connects “prehellenic and Semitic myths”, and this error is not only one of date, but of status. The Pentateuch is strictly speaking a mytho-logical work, and biblical symbols are not “pre-rational” but belong to what Ricœur said about emplotment in *Time and Narrative I*: “To make up a plot is already to make the intelligible spring from the accidental, the universal from the singular, the necessary or the probable from the episodic” (Ricœur 1984: 41). Biblical reflexivity attacks myth by summoning its textual heritage in order to subvert by means that are also strictly textual: the desubstantialisation of nature promotes, first of all, a new possible use of language.

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¹⁰It is remarkable that this same “sin” committed by humanity in its early stages where we find men who consider themselves as “sons of God” and who choose women for themselves simply because they find them beautiful to look at (Gen. 6, 1–2); and it is the perversion of this tendency that triggers the deluge. Its rejection brings about a first universal “law” that is called Noachian.

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Intersectional Hermeneutics

Scott Davidson

Abstract Hermeneutics begins in response to the threat of misunderstanding, which it seeks to rectify through the work of interpretation. Yet, inasmuch as the products of interpretation can never secure themselves from this very same threat, they require constant phenomenological vigilance, in turn. This chapter applies this critical vigilance to Ricoeur’s own articulation of hermeneutics, showing that its commitment to structuralism imposes an unwarranted restriction on the things themselves. This poses a serious challenge for Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. For, if structuralism does not enhance understanding, then Ricoeur’s hermeneutic circle becomes a vicious circle that begins and ends with misunderstanding. As a way to surmount this problem, this chapter develops the alternative of an intersectional hermeneutics in which intersectional theory takes over the role previously played by structuralism.

Keywords Structuralism • Hermeneutics • Phenomenology • Intersectionality • The Tempest

In response to a question about what tradition his work belongs to, Ricoeur answers that his philosophy “stands in the line of a reflexive philosophy; it remains within the sphere of Husserlian phenomenology; it strives to be a hermeneutical variation of this phenomenology” (Ricoeur 1991: 12). To say that his thought stands “in the line of” reflexive philosophy and remains “within the sphere of Husserlian phenomenology” means that Ricoeur situates his project within a philosophical lineage that can be traced back to the Socratic injunction to “know oneself”. Indeed, as Johann Michel suggests, the search for self-understanding can be taken as a guiding thread in Ricoeur’s writings from beginning to end (Michel 2010). In the context of reflexive philosophy as well as Husserlian phenomenology, self-understanding is

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identified with reflexivity, that is, the operation of turning one's own thoughts back onto oneself. In so doing, the self acquires an immediate or direct knowledge of its own conscious performances, such as its acts of knowing, willing, judging, moving, etc. But, it is precisely this type of self-understanding, exemplified by the reflexive self-certitude of the Cartesian *cogito*, that Ricoeur criticizes for being "as vain as it is invincible" (Ricoeur 1978: 102).

Ricoeur, by contrast, proposes a hermeneutic variant of the quest for self-understanding. This approach, in addition to being motivated by the emptiness of self-certitude, is also prompted by his reading of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. From the masters of suspicion, Ricoeur learns that direct consciousness is always exposed to the threat of "false consciousness" (Ricoeur 1974: 102). As a result of the various ways in which one can come to misunderstand oneself – e.g. through the distortions produced by ideology, narcissism, repression – the search for self-understanding must follow a longer route than the one travelled by either reflexive philosophy or Husserlian phenomenology. It must pass through the detour of the external products of life.¹ As Ricoeur puts it, "there is no self-understanding that is not mediated by signs, symbols, and texts; in the last resort understanding coincides with the interpretation given to these mediating terms" (Ricoeur 1991: 15). It is thus only by passing through the detour of understanding the external world that the self can arrive at a mediated self-understanding that is freed from the distortions of direct consciousness.

Yet, if it is the case that consciousness is always shadowed by the threat of false consciousness, then suspicion must be cast likewise over the products of hermeneutic reflection themselves. That is to say that the hermeneutic detour through the external products of life can also fall under the sway of false consciousness, and for that reason, hermeneutics needs to be accompanied by a phenomenological vigilance that constantly watches over the work of interpretation. Hermeneutics therefore must be constructive in the sense that it seeks to increase understanding as well as critical in the sense that its products must be evaluated in terms of their fidelity to the phenomena.

This chapter will apply this type of critical vigilance to Ricoeur's own articulation of hermeneutics. It will show that Ricoeur's version of the hermeneutic circle – his interpretation of the work of interpretation, so to speak – is an unfortunate example of an unwarranted restriction imposed on the "things themselves."² To be precise, this narrowing of the phenomena will be traced back to the prominent role of structuralism in Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Guided by the example of critical

¹It is important to recall that, even though Ricoeur's discussion of textual hermeneutics tends to emphasize the role of literature in promoting a deeper self-understanding, hermeneutics need not be reduced to the study of literary texts. Instead, the interpretation of texts provides a model of interpretative activity that "may be extended beyond textual entities to all social phenomena because it is not limited in its application to linguistic signs but applies to all kinds of signs that are analogous to linguistic signs" (Ricoeur 1991: 165.) In this way, hermeneutics can also be applied to the interpretation of actions, history, society, and many other phenomena.

²For a more detailed account of Ricoeur's hermeneutic critique of phenomenology, see (Davidson 2013).

controversy over the interpretation of Shakespeare's play "The Tempest", this chapter will show that structuralist explanation narrows the meaning of the text and thus impedes the search for self-understanding, in turn. This gives rise to a serious problem for Ricoeur's hermeneutics. If structuralism does not enhance understanding by explaining more, then Ricoeur's hermeneutic circle becomes a vicious circle that leads nowhere: it begins and ends with misunderstanding.

To overcome this problem, the second half of this chapter will embark on a constructive effort to salvage Ricoeur's hermeneutics. It will propose an intersectional hermeneutics in which intersectional theory takes over the role formerly played by structuralism in Ricoeur's hermeneutics. An intersectional hermeneutics is the product of an alignment between the discourse of hermeneutics and that of intersectional theory. In the most general terms, intersectionality could be characterized as the view that plurivocal phenomena cannot be understood in an additive way where one layer of meaning is simply added on to the next, instead their meaning must be approached in terms of distinctive combinations that are formed by the intersections of multiple layers of meaning. To borrow a classic example, take the example of the concept of "woman" and the concept of "the colonized". To understand the condition of a "colonized woman," intersectional theory argues that it does not suffice simply to add the condition of being a woman to the condition of being colonized; instead, it is necessary to understand the distinctive phenomenon brought about by the intersection of these two factors.

By bringing intersectional theory into dialogue with Ricoeur's hermeneutics, both discourses stand to benefit from an "intersectional hermeneutics." On the one hand, intersectional theorists have been criticized for lacking a method and a clear theoretical aim in their analyses. Ricoeur's hermeneutics provides a theoretical framework and aim for intersectionality by situating it within the broader search for self-understanding. As such, intersectionality becomes part of the hermeneutic detour that sets out to overcome the misunderstanding produced by additive or reductive approaches to self-understanding. On the other hand, Ricoeur's hermeneutics can benefit from this new connection through which intersectionality takes the place of structuralism. With this new approach, the hope is to develop a hermeneutic theory that genuinely lives up to Ricoeur's dictum that "to explain more is to understand better" (Ricoeur 2013: 11).

The Role of Structuralism in the Hermeneutic Circle

This section will establish the necessary background to set the place for the criticism of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, viz. its commitment to structuralism. Ricoeur's version of the hermeneutic circle, to recall, develops along the trajectory of three stages: (1) it begins with the pre-understanding of the reader; (2) passes through the explanation of the text; (3) and culminates with deeper understanding through the reader's act of appropriation. By leading to deeper self-understanding, the hermeneutic circle claims to overcome the trap of a vicious circle in which one would only

come to understand the world in terms of what was already known at the outset. Instead, it follows the arc of a virtuous circle – or better, an ascending spiral – in which the detour through the text leads from an initial understanding at the beginning to a better understanding of oneself at the end.

In what follows, I will provide a brief overview of Ricoeur's description of each of these stages. The first stage of this development, pre-understanding, will be connected with the historicist theory of interpretation, while the second stage of this development, explanation, will be linked with structuralism. Taking their respective interpretations of Shakespeare's play "The Tempest" as an example, I will provide evidence to support Ricoeur's view that each of these theories of interpretation, taken on its own, falls short of the overall trajectory of the hermeneutic arc. What makes Ricoeur's hermeneutics distinctive, then, is that historicism and structuralism are only stages in the process of understanding. While each of these theories is assigned an important role to play in his version of the hermeneutic circle, his unique contribution will be to inscribe them within a more comprehensive framework.

The first phase of the hermeneutic circle is pre-understanding, which is heavily influenced by Gadamer's hermeneutics. Instead of approaching a text from nowhere, we always encounter a text from a specific point of view, or what Gadamer calls a "prejudice". Here a prejudice is not the opposite of a rationally justified opinion, instead it has the more literal sense of a pre-judgment. As such, a prejudice does not get in the way of our ability to encounter a text but rather is what makes this encounter possible in the first place. The reader's pre-understanding includes, among other things, the historical background and traditions a reader brings to a text. In addition, it includes a set of competencies that the reader has developed, such as the ability to read, to follow a story, as well as a general familiarity with the world. Together, the reader's pre-understanding establishes the background set of expectations and operative knowledge that makes it possible for readers to approach the text.

This emphasis on the role of history and tradition in the work of understanding can easily lend credence to a historicist theory of textual interpretation. In historicism, the task of interpretation is to overcome the historical distance that separates the world of the reader from the world of the author. And it is precisely through the appeal to a common tradition that the historicist approach seeks to bridge this gap. Historicist interpretation leads the reader back to the original conditions of the time and place in which the work was produced. One good example of this approach, if we take the example of Shakespeare's play "The Tempest", is provided by Frank Kermode.³

Kermode presents "The Tempest" as Shakespeare's response to the encounter with the New World in the Elizabethan era.⁴ "The Tempest," according to this reading, gives expression to an intricate vision of a cosmic order in which European

³Note that Ricoeur does cite Kermode in a number of his texts on narrative, however he does not cite Kermode's work on this play. Instead, Ricoeur engages his book *The Sense of An Ending* (Kermode 1968).

⁴See the relevant excerpt from (Kermode 2009).

civilization triumphs over the untamed and wild impulses of nature. Prospero, then, is taken to represent the European explorer who encounters Caliban, the uncivilized savage. Although Caliban first presents himself amiably as a noble savage, he later reveals his true nature in resorting to treachery against Prospero and sexual violence against Miranda. Caliban's inability to control his base impulses ultimately justifies Prospero's use of knowledge and sorcery to rule over Caliban and the rest of the island. In so doing, Prospero is able to bring peace and prosperity to the island. As a result of his historicist approach to the play, Kermode sees "The Tempest" as Shakespeare's attempt to reinforce the Elizabethan worldview of his audience. The play establishes the legitimacy of European dominion over the New World.

Without yet evaluating the merits of this interpretation of Shakespeare, it is important to recall that Ricoeur rejects the historicist assumption that the task of interpretation is to lead the reader back to the world of the author. Instead of seeking to understand the author, Ricoeur's hermeneutics shifts the locus of the hermeneutical question from the author's world to the world of the text. The text opens up a possible world that stands at a distance from the actual world of the author as well as that of the reader. It is clear that structuralism, with its rejection of authorial intent and its emphasis on the autonomy of the text, paves the way for this shift of focus in Ricoeur's hermeneutics.⁵ Indeed, structuralist explanation of the text becomes the second phase of his hermeneutic circle.

What Ricoeur finds of great value in structuralism is that it offers a mode of explanation that is irreducible to the causal explanation employed by the natural sciences. Instead of seeking to naturalize the human sciences, structuralist explanation emerges from the human sciences themselves, specifically, from the domain of language. The structuralist analysis of language, initiated by Saussure, begins with the distinction between speech and language. Whereas speech involves discourse between speakers, language is composed of a system of signs. The study of language as a system is carried out by an operation that is similar to the phenomenological reduction,⁶ in the sense that the referential function of language is bracketed in order to return to its nodal or "zero degree".⁷ That is to say that the structuralist approach to language considers the basic units of language – signs – purely as linguistic elements whose meanings are determined by their differences or oppositions with other signs⁸

Applied to the world of the text, structural explanation can be summed up in terms of three basic features. First, structuralism maintains that the text can be

⁵Ricoeur grants structuralism a privileged role in the work of interpretation, noting "... I do not at present see any more rigorous or more fruitful approach than the structuralist method at the level of comprehension which is its own" (Ricoeur 1974: 30).

⁶That said, there remains an essential distinction between phenomenology and structuralism. The structuralist bracketing is much more radical insofar as it does not only bracket the referent but also brackets the subject as a giver of meaning. In other words, it brackets the world as well as the subject in order to pay attention to the system of signs.

⁷This expression refers to Roland Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero* (Barthes 1977).

⁸For more detail about the history of the structuralist movement, see (Dosse 1997).

studied as a closed system. Like language, the referent of the text can be bracketed so that the text can be studied purely on its own terms. To do so is to study the text in terms of its basic units and their arrangement in relation to each other. Second, the closure of the text establishes its semantic autonomy from the author. As soon as a text is set into writing, the matter of the text becomes separated from the author. That is to say that the world of the text establishes its own horizon exceeding that of the author. Third, the study of the text as a closed system reveals the proper meaning of the text. Its own meaning is freed from the restraints of the author's original intention as well as the audience's original reception of the play. Structuralist explanation studies the internal organization of the text and thereby reveals its deep semantics, regardless of whether the author or audience would have been conscious of it.

One good example of a structuralist interpretation, applied to "The Tempest", is provided by the work of Reuben A. Brower (Brower 2009). In contrast with Kermode's historicism, Brower examines the internal structure of the text as a closed system of signs. In so doing, he finds that the play is governed by a set of metaphorical pairs: "strange-wondrous," "sleep-and-dream," "sea-tempest," "music-and-noise," "earth-air," "slavery-freedom," and "sovereignty-conspiracy" (Brower 2009: 226). Shakespeare establishes the internal unity of the play by introducing these metaphors in the initial scenes of the play and then by reiterating them in various combinations throughout the rest of the play. Ultimately, Brower suggests that these contrasts, in turn, are unified by one underlying metaphor that governs the overarching logic of the play: the metaphor of change. This means that each of the metaphorical contrasts listed above points to a metamorphosis of some kind, for instance, from sleep to waking, from storm to calm, from servitude to freedom. These transformations shape the development of the plot, and they are all present in Prospero's speech in Act 4, Scene 1, which includes the famous lines: "We are such stuff/ As dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep" (4.1.156-158). Prospero's speech suggests that the main drama of the play revolves around the process of metamorphosis through which the characters on the island become transformed, all of them, that is, except for the unchanging Caliban. Through his structuralist reading of "The Tempest", Brower is thus able to reveal a deep semantics of the text that cannot be glimpsed on the surface of the plot or by the study of its historical production.

Although Ricoeur looks to structural explanation of this kind to discover the deep semantics of the text, he rejects the notion that structural analysis could ever complete the hermeneutic arc. To identify the basic oppositions in a text, on his view, is not yet to give it a meaning. After all, readers do not read a text for the sake of identifying a set of formal oppositions and struggles contained within a text. Readers turn to texts in a search for meaning. They want the text to give meaning to their own world and their own lives. This is why structural explanation always points toward a third phase in the hermeneutic arc, namely, self-understanding.

The key feature of this third phase is what Ricoeur calls "appropriation". The locus of the hermeneutic question, as we have said, is not to discover the intentions of the author but to explore the world of the text. The text presents a possible world, another possible form of life, to the reader. It is through the act of appropriation that

the reader brings the world of the text into connection with his or her own world here and now. The act of appropriation thus helps us to see how a hermeneutics of understanding can contribute to the goals of a reflexive philosophy. Here, as Ricoeur puts it, interpretation “culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself” (Ricoeur 1991: 158). Through the detour of the text, the reader does not simply leave him or herself behind, but comes back with a new and more profound level of self-understanding.

One way to think about Ricoeur’s articulation of the hermeneutic circle – with its starting point of the pre-understanding of a tradition, passing through a structuralist interpretation of the world of the text, and culminating with the appropriation of the text to understand better – is as a reconciliation of two rival theories of interpretation. His treatment of historicism and structuralism is at once critical and constructive. It is critical in the sense that it denies their pretenses to provide a complete theory of interpretation, but it is constructive in the sense that he grants each theory a limited role within his more comprehensive framework. While Ricoeur’s attempt to provide a productive reconciliation of their differences is admirable, it should also be met with a healthy dose of skepticism as to whether it can really leave the problems inherent to those frameworks behind. The remainder of this chapter will pinpoint two fundamental problems with Ricoeur’s hermeneutic circle that motivate the need to go beyond what is actually articulated there.

One problem derives from the fact that the work of interpretation is always haunted by the threat of misunderstanding. Indeed it could be argued, as post-colonial critics have done, that the historicist and structuralist interpretations of “*The Tempest*” presented above are the products of a distorted, colonial consciousness. For they approach the play by adopting Prospero’s perspective but ignore other interpretive possibilities that could arise from the adoption of other perspectives such as that of Miranda and the colonized Caliban. Their interpretations, as post-colonial critics suggest, are thus developed through the perspective of a colonial ideology that narrows the polysemy of the text. An intersectional hermeneutics, by contrast, can accommodate these competing perspectives in a way that opens up and preserves the multiple possible meanings of the text. This first problem reinforces the need for continual critical vigilance over the work of interpretation, insofar as the work of interpretation is always exposed to the possibility of ideological distortion and I will return to this point later. The second criticism, however, identifies a fundamental problem that is specific to Ricoeur’s own hermeneutic framework. This has to do with Ricoeur’s overly conciliatory treatment of structuralism. By granting structuralism a legitimate role in the hermeneutic circle albeit one that is limited to second phase of the hermeneutic circle – the phase of explanation – Ricoeur’s account of hermeneutics runs the risk of falling back into a vicious circle in which misunderstanding only leads to more misunderstanding. Insofar as this criticism presents a significant challenge to Ricoeur’s hermeneutic project, the following section will develop the argument that Ricoeur’s critique of structuralism is too conciliatory and thus generous to a fault.

Ricoeur's Critique of Structural Explanation and Its Limitations

Ricoeur's identification of explanation with structuralism is difficult to maintain today, when structural analysis has collapsed and lost every shred of credibility. A sympathetic reader could argue that Ricoeur's endorsement of structuralism is not essential to his hermeneutics but merely a contingent byproduct of the particular time in which he happened to be writing. Structuralism, after all, was the predominant theory of the late 1950s and 1960s when he developed his hermeneutic theory, and it is perfectly appropriate to focus on the prevailing views of one's own time. This defense of Ricoeur's hermeneutics as a product of his historical times, though valid, can only have a limited value because it does not justify the continued use of structuralism today. Moreover, it cannot account for the fact that Ricoeur continues to affirm the validity of structuralism to the very end of his career, long after the influence of structuralism had waned and had been widely rejected. Instead of taking the opportunity to denounce it in hindsight, Ricoeur continues to adorn his hermeneutics with structuralism like the outmoded suit of an old professor.

Another possible line of defense would be to argue that even though Ricoeur makes use of structuralism, he is always critical of it.⁹ Ricoeur repeatedly insists on the point that structuralism must remain "conscious of its conditions of validity and thus of its limits" (Ricoeur 1974: 39). That is to say that he rejects the pretenses of structuralism to become a universal theory of explanation, instead it only has a limited scope of validity for a limited range of phenomena. One of these limitations, according to Ricoeur, is the priority that the structuralist model grants "toward a logic of oppositions and correlations, that is to say, finally, toward a system of differences" (Ricoeur 1974: 38). This model assumes the existence of a sharp set of distinctions according to which structure precedes process, synchrony precedes diachrony, and the system precedes the event. But, in a move similar to later post-structuralist critics, Ricoeur collapses these distinctions by showing that each of these purportedly opposed terms dialectically calls for completion by its opposite.¹⁰ Put in the simplest terms, the structure of language always refers to the process of discourse, the synchrony of the text always points to the diachrony of a tradition, and the system of signs always refers to the event of speaking, and so forth. For this reason, the structuralist model can only provide a partial but never complete explanation of phenomena.

The same criticism of structuralism is implicit in Ricoeur's account of the hermeneutic circle. Ricoeur places understanding and explanation in a dialectical

⁹Here Ricoeur identifies a contrast between structuralism as a science and as a philosophy: "Structural anthropology seems to me to be convincing as long as it understands itself as the extension, by degrees, of an explanation which was first successful in linguistics, then in systems of kinship, and finally extending, little by little, by the play of affinities with the linguistic model, to all forms of social life. By the same token, it seems to me suspect when it sets itself up as a philosophy" (Ricoeur 1974: 51).

¹⁰For some pertinent connections to the post-structuralists, see (Michel 2014).

relationship where understanding calls for explanation, and explanation, in turn, calls for understanding. Structural explanation has a legitimate role in the work of interpretation because it can identify an internal logic of the text that does not depend on the conscious intentions of the author or the reader. Structural explanation thus establishes the semantic autonomy of the text. But, as Ricoeur puts it, “an order posited as unconscious can never, to my mind, be more than a stage abstractly separated from an understanding of the self by itself...” (Ricoeur 1974: 51). To the extent that structural explanation only offers a “thought which does not think itself,” it necessarily remains incomplete. That is to say that it cannot resolve the question of the human meaning of the work but only postpones it (Ricoeur 1991: 120–121). Structuralism can only be a moment within a broader hermeneutic arc, because it calls for the work of understanding to complete it with the human meaning of the work (Ricoeur 1974: 60).

While it is true that Ricoeur does call attention to the limits of structuralist explanation, it also remains legitimate to wonder whether his criticism goes far enough. The problem with Ricoeur’s hermeneutic circle, as I see it, is not that structuralism is granted a limited role but that it is granted any role at all. Today structuralism is purely a historical artifact. In disciplines ranging from linguistics to literary theory to anthropology, structuralism has been refuted, debunked and dismissed. As a linguistic theory, it has been criticized for reducing language to a static system and ignoring the question of the production of linguistic meaning (Chomsky 1979). In the domain of literary criticism, its focus on discovering the deep structure of texts has been rejected for blurring over significant textual details that differentiate texts.¹¹ In anthropology, it has been criticized for imposing a theoretical construct that is not supported by empirical facts about culture (Lett 1987). From a phenomenological standpoint, these criticisms could be summed up with the charge that structuralism imposes an artificial explanatory schema that distorts the things themselves.

As a result of this wholesale rejection of structural explanation, Ricoeur’s articulation of the hermeneutic circle would be faced with a significant challenge. The purpose of explanation in the hermeneutic circle is to provide better understanding of the text. But, if the phase of explanation is guided by a failed theory of explanation, then it will not give rise to understanding but only misunderstanding. And, if the hermeneutic circle leads back to misunderstanding, then it collapses into a vicious circle which begins and ends with misunderstanding. This is precisely the problem that results from Ricoeur’s continued use of structural explanation, and consequently the question for Ricoeur scholars today is whether Ricoeur’s hermeneutics can continue to have any relevance, and if so, under what conditions this is possible.

In the effort to salvage Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, one possible approach might be to create a Ricoeurian hermeneutics that replaces structural explanation with another theory that is more widely accepted today. This would be a reasonable strategy to the extent that our understanding is always shaped by and limited to the best available knowledge of a given time. The task, then, would be to update Ricoeur’s hermeneutics by identifying the best available substitute for structuralist explanation.

¹¹ This is only one of the many criticisms developed in post-structuralist literary thought.

But, assuming that such a theory does exist, this updated Ricoeurian hermeneutics would be exposed to the threat of being only a temporary fix. As different theories come into vogue, it too would stand in need of replacement at some later date. Consequently, this approach would run the risk of exposing Ricoeur's hermeneutics to the vicissitudes of intellectual fads, as if it were in need of continual revision in order to meet the demands of the changing times. While that is one possible direction to pursue in the attempt to salvage a Ricoeurian hermeneutics, here I want to pursue a slightly different course.

The main flaw in Ricoeur's account of explanation, arguably, is more profound than his adherence to structuralism. It might have to do with the fact that structuralism is a "single-axis" method of explanation and the limitations inherent in any "single-axis method" whatsoever. Regardless of whether it is a structuralism or any other single-axis explanation, the problem is that a single-axis theory will narrow the plurivocity of the text. Like many other phenomena such as myths, symbols and actions, the text is plurivocal, which is to say that it is "overdetermined" and "saturated" with meaning.¹² Plurivocal phenomena call for a type of explanation that is more faithful to their plurivocity. Here it is not sufficient simply to add one more single-axis theory on to another one; instead what is needed is different kind of theory altogether: a multi-axis theory of explanation. This type of explanation will be described, in what follows, under the heading of an "intersectional hermeneutics".¹³

Intersectional Hermeneutics

Intersectional theory is most commonly invoked in current research on social oppression.¹⁴ Within that context, it maintains that single-axis categories of oppression, such as racism, sexism or colonialism, are not sufficient on their own to account for the phenomenon of oppression. Instead, it could be said that oppression is an example of a "plurivocal" phenomenon which is saturated with meaning. Indeed, intersectional theorists argue that it is necessary to examine oppression through the intersections between different categories of oppression. Although women, for instance, are a disadvantaged social group in a patriarchal society, it is not the case that all women share the same concrete experience of oppression. To account for a woman's oppression, it is not enough to know that a woman lives in a sexist society; in addition, it might be necessary to know something about her

¹²The notion of the overdeterminacy of meaning is drawn from (Ricoeur 1970: 516). By attaching the term "saturated" here, I am suggesting a connection to Jean-Luc Marion's notion of a "saturated phenomenon" (Marion 2004). Initial steps toward this connection have been made in comparisons of Ricoeur and Marion have been made, for instance, in (Gschwandtner 2012). Still more work remains to be done, however, in comparing their respective approaches to the saturated phenomenon through the phenomenon of the text.

¹³Initial steps in this direction were taken in (Davidson and Davidson 2015).

¹⁴The lineage of this notion can be traced back to (Crenshaw 1989).

race, class, or sexual orientation, for example. These factors are not simply additive as if they could simply be added on to the generic experience of sexism. Instead, the particular intersections between them give rise to qualitatively distinct experiences of oppression and marginalization. Intersectionality, by taking a multi-variable approach to explanation, is thereby able to shed light on how various forms of oppression can function together to create an interlocking matrix of oppression.

To illustrate this point, Kimberlé Crenshaw provides the example of rape and domestic violence clinics that are unable to respond to all women's needs equally. A victim of domestic violence, for instance, might be reluctant to file a complaint due to her immigration status or due to the lack of an interpreter on site. The point is not to say that these centers are discriminatory, but that they are structured in such a way that they serve the actual needs of some women better than those of others. The end result is that, consciously or not, such centers end up empowering some members of a group, while disempowering others.

Inspired by Crenshaw's analyses, a number of other scholars have extended the notion of intersectionality to the study of other complex social phenomena such as the family, the labor market, the law, and public policy, to name only a few examples.¹⁵ In a similar vein, I would like to extend the insights of intersectional analysis to the plurivocity of the text.¹⁶ With its multi-axis approach, intersectional explanation can overcome the intrinsic limitations of single-axis modes of explanation like structuralism and provide a better way of dealing with the plurivocity of the text. This contrast will be highlighted, in what follows, by returning to the example of Shakespeare's "The Tempest."

Lets begin by recalling the point that interpretations do not only overcome misunderstanding but also can perpetuate misunderstanding when they remain under the sway of false consciousness. In spite of their radical differences, both the historicist and the structuralist interpretations of "The Tempest" are guided by an underlying form of false consciousness: the ideology of European colonization. This ideological bias, as post-colonial theorists have argued, can be demonstrated by their interpretation of the relation between Prospero and Caliban. By valorizing Prospero while marginalizing Caliban, their interpretation adopts, consciously or not, the standpoint of the colonial project.

To recall, Kermode's historicist approach to "The Tempest" identifies the hermeneutic question in terms of what Shakespeare would have communicated to his

¹⁵Another example of a multi-axis approach can be drawn from discussions of the political spectrum. Rather than simply describing it in terms of the opposition between left and right, multi-axis approaches to the political spectrum seek to identify the important differences and linkages that are found across this spectrum.

¹⁶While Ricoeur's hermeneutics can benefit from intersectionality, it is also the case that intersectional scholars stand to gain something important from Ricoeur. In response to the growing use of the term, intersectionality has come under fire lately precisely for its lack of a clear and rigorous methodology. Leslie McCall, among others has raised the objection that intersectionality lacks conceptual clarity and a rigorous method (McCall 2005). (Davidson and Davidson 2015) suggest that intersectional theory can surmount these objections by drawing from Ricoeur's hermeneutics.

audience at the time. The play, he suggests, was a response to questions with regard to the European discovery of the New World. Kermode takes Shakespeare's play to present a vision of a cosmic order that legitimates Prospero's right to rule over Caliban and the other inhabitants of the island. Likewise, the structuralist reading of "The Tempest" falls under the sway of colonial ideology, in spite of its emphasis on the semantic autonomy of the text. Brower's interpretation, to recall, examines the internal logic of the text in terms of a set of underlying oppositions and uncovers the overarching metaphor of change that governs the play. All of the characters in the play undergo a metamorphosis over the course of the drama, all of them, that is, except for Caliban who stands out as unable to change, insofar as he is deemed to be: "A devil, a born devil, on whose nature/ Nurture can never stick" (4.1.188-189). Brower's interpretation, as a result, places Prospero at the center of the drama of metamorphosis and marginalizes Caliban an outcast situated in the periphery of the text.

Through their positioning of Prospero and Caliban, it could be argued that both of the above interpretations are complicit with a colonial ideology that justifies European rule over the New World.¹⁷ To counter the misunderstandings of the text that can result from these assumptions, it is necessary to return to and reflect on initial interpretive questions: How does the shipwrecked Prospero come to have the right to rule over the island? Is this due to the power of his rule or the rule of his power? Why doesn't Caliban change in the course of the play? Is this due to the animality of his uncivilized nature or to the social oppression of Prospero that prevents him from changing? (see Césaire, 1992).¹⁸ An intersectional hermeneutics can lead us to look at these questions in a new light.

Intersectional hermeneutics can examine the text along multiple axes. Instead of reducing the play to Prospero's perspective, it account for the competing narratives that are told in act 1, scene 2 of "The Tempest". On the one hand, we hear Prospero's story of the usurpation of his dukedom and his banishment to the island, but on the other hand, there is also the side of the story told by Caliban who notes his initial hospitality to Prospero who subsequently usurps and enslaves him. Whereas the former story echoes the narrative of legitimacy that supports colonial rule, Caliban's version of the story challenges this narrative from the colonized's point of view.¹⁹ This "conflict of interpretations" unsettles any attempt to assign the play a unified meaning, instead its meaning emerges plurivocally in and through the competing narratives of the play.

Depending on who is telling the story, a different set of reasons is given for Caliban's purported inability to change. On the one hand, Prospero attributes Caliban's inability to change to his refusal of an educational project. While Prospero

¹⁷This critique of the received ideas about "The Tempest" is now well-established in post-colonial criticism that depicts Caliban in a more favorable light. For example, see (Mannoni 1990) and (Brown 2009).

¹⁸Questions such as these prompted Aimé Césaire to write his 1969 play, "A Tempest," which re-envisions the play from the perspective of the colonized.

¹⁹I am bracketing another tale of competing stories, that is, the Miranda-Caliban discussion.

sought to give language and training, Caliban was unable to receive this gift due to his uncivilized nature. When Caliban is judged to be unteachable by nature, the role of power in Prospero's rule is effaced; its legitimacy is rooted in the right of civilization to rule over brute nature. But, from Caliban's own point of view, Prospero's educational project is not as benign as he suggests. Instead of being a gift, it is a violent imposition of a colonial language and culture on to the colonized. From this perspective, Caliban's refusal of this so-called "gift" becomes an act of willful resistance against the colonial project. As a result of these competing narratives of the colonizer and the colonized, a conflict of interpretations emerges with respect to Caliban's actions.²⁰ This conflict is deepened even further when it comes to the struggle between Prospero and Caliban over Prospero's daughter, Miranda. Here the colonial project intersects with gender such that their becomes a battle between men over the right to control Miranda.

These competing narratives, told and untold, open up the plurivocity of the text from beginning to end. When at the end of the play, Prospero assigns Caliban to himself, calling him "this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (5.1.275-76), the meaning of his statement remains ambiguous. On the one hand, Prospero's words could be interpreted as a claim of possession and ownership over this monster that is his property. Or, on the other hand, his words could be interpreted as an expression of recognition and acknowledgment of this other. Depending on the meaning given to this passage, the ending of the play could either express Prospero's continued oppression of Caliban or a moment of resolution through his recognition of the other. If it is clear that Prospero's statement belongs within the context of a struggle for recognition, it is unclear at the end of the play whether this recognition has been extended or denied.²¹

The strength of an intersectional hermeneutics, as I construe it, is that its multi-axis approach keeps this struggle open, without reducing the text to one alternative or the other. Whereas the structuralist analysis of the text encloses its meaning within a system and imposes a unified meaning on to the text, intersectional explanation, by contrast, preserves the ambiguity of the text by accommodating the intersection of competing perspectives and narratives in the text.

²⁰The competition between these two narratives is described well in (Memmi1965). To extend this analogy, it would be interesting to connect Memmi's contrast between "the colonized who accepts" and "the colonized who refuses" with Shakespeare's characters Ariel and Caliban.

²¹I mention this, of course, in reference to Ricoeur's later work on recognition. While this is not the context to do so, it would be fascinating to situate Ricoeur's notion of the gift of recognition within the context of "The Tempest" but also of Shakespeare's other plays that touch on the theme of recognition.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that Ricoeur's articulation of the hermeneutic circle faces a serious challenge as a result of its identification of structuralism with the phase of explanation. Structural explanation was purported to provide access to the deep meaning of the text, however structuralism's collapse gives rise to a dilemma for Ricoeur's hermeneutics today. If structuralism is retained but falsifies the phenomena, then it does not add to understanding. By leading only into a vicious circle, Ricoeur's hermeneutic circle would have to be abandoned. Alternately, it might be possible to salvage a Ricoeurian hermeneutics through the rejection of structural explanation. But if structuralism were rejected, then the phase of explanation would be emptied of its content and it becomes unclear what would be left of the hermeneutic circle. The question for Ricoeur scholars, in response to this dilemma, is to determine how, if at all, a Ricoeurian hermeneutics can be salvaged.

By introducing the notion of an intersectional hermeneutics, this chapter has proposed one possible answer to this dilemma. Intersectional hermeneutics overcomes one of the main limitations of structural explanation, because it can accommodate the plurivocity of the text without narrowing it to a single axis of meaning. At the same time, intersectional hermeneutics also promotes the hermeneutic aim of leading toward greater self-understanding. Through an intersectional explanation of the text, the reader is exposed not just to a point of view that is different from his or her own but to multiple, competing points of view. As a result, it could be said that the text performs its own act of distanciation through which the competing narratives divide the text from itself. Exposure to these competing perspectives can produce a distanciation for the reader, in turn, that can help the reader see how his or her own ideological biases may distort or oversimplify plurivocal phenomena. In so doing, an intersectional hermeneutic can provide a deeper understanding not only of the world but also of oneself.

To be sure, readers of Ricoeur are quite aware that his hermeneutic theory is not limited to the interpretation of literary texts. The theory of the text serves as a model for the interpretation of other phenomena, including human action and history. To the extent that this chapter has focused on the literary text, the task of extending intersectionality to these other types of phenomena still remains to be carried out. Yet, what makes an intersectional hermeneutics most compelling, to my mind, is precisely its potential contribution to these other domains in which intersectional explanation has already been applied. Intersectional hermeneutics, I would conjecture, is able to approach phenomena like action and history in a way that remains consistent with Ricoeur's conceptual work on these topics. But it also promises to yield substantive new insights by providing a passage "to the concrete", and in so doing, revealing the influence of race, class and gender on their meaning.

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Hermeneutics and Truth: From *Alētheia* to Attestation

Sebastian Purcell

Abstract This essay aims to correct a prevalent misconception about Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, which understands it to support a conception of human understanding as finite as Heidegger did, but in a more "conceptually conservative" way. The result is that Ricoeur's work is viewed as incapable of addressing the most pressing problems in contemporary Continental metaphysics. In response, it is argued that Ricoeur is in fact the first to develop an infinite hermeneutics, which develops Heidegger's sense of hermeneutics significantly. This position is demonstrated by tracing the itinerary from Heidegger's account of *aletheia* to Ricoeur's account of attestation. The conclusion, then, not only clears Ricoeur of the stated charges, but also presents a more viable path for the future of hermeneutics.

Keywords Aletheia • Attestation • Events • Heidegger • Truth

The aim of the present essay is two-fold.¹ On the one hand, it seeks to correct a misconception in the received view regarding the character of Paul Ricoeur's reflective hermeneutics. This is a misconception that, if true, would suggest that Ricoeur's thought is inadequate for addressing the most fundamental concerns of metaphysics, even if it is innovative in other areas. On the other, by correcting this misconception and demonstrating how it is that Ricoeur's reflective philosophy is committed to what might be considered the infinite dimension of understanding, it seeks to pose a challenge to Heideggerian thought.

The misconception that I seek to redress holds that Ricoeur's hermeneutics is, like Martin Heidegger's and Hans-Georg Gadamer's, committed to the finitude of human understanding (*Verstand*), but unlike Heidegger it is not open to the radical

¹This essay was originally published in *Etudes Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies* Vol 4, No 1 (2013), pp. 140–158. It was facilitated by many helpful commentators, including those in the audience at the third annual Society for Ricoeur Studies Conference at George Mason University as well as the insightful comments by two anonymous reviewers.

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and unpredictable, horizon-shattering im-possibility of the event (*Ereignis*).² In Anglophone circles, one finds this treatment, for example, in John Caputo's *Radical Hermeneutics* and other of his essays concerning the hermeneutics of religion.³ In a chapter of the book, he begins his critique by arguing that Gadamer is a "right-wing" conservative hermeneutician, and then moves to critique Ricoeur stating: "Dissemination effects a disruption of semantics, even when semantics tries to protect itself, when it tries to make concessions, with a theory of polysemy, such as those of Ricoeur" (Caputo 1987: 149). In this criticism one notes that he merely asserts, rather than argues, that what holds for Gadamer must hold "*a fortiori*" for Ricoeur as well (Caputo 1987: 5).⁴ A similar evaluation is also to be found in Francophone discourse. Claude Romano, who considers himself a hermeneutic phenomenologist, brings Gadamer and Ricoeur together as failing to live up to the task announced by Heideggerian hermeneutics stating: "By being thus diverted from the problem of metaphysics on the one hand (Gadamer) in an explicit manner, and on the other (Paul Ricoeur or Charles Taylor) in a manner less declared, the representatives of hermeneutic philosophy have acted in large measure to the detriment of their coherence" (Romano 2003: 13). What separates Gadamer from Ricoeur in Romano's estimation, then, is that the latter is more muddle-headed, less clear, about what he is doing, but there is no real conceptual difference. Finally, I note that this understanding of Ricoeur's philosophical position as wed to Heidegger through Gadamer also seems to be behind Alain Badiou's severe criticism of *Memory, History, and Forgetting*, since he takes it as certain that Ricoeur shares Heidegger's account of truth.⁵

There are more cases which exhibit this misconception concerning Ricoeur's thought.⁶ Yet the philosophically relevant aspect of this assessment concerns its implications for the viability of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics. Since it is maintained, and I agree, that only an openness to the event enables one to twist-free from the metaphysics of presence, from ontotheology, Ricoeur's thought is held to be too conservative to meet the challenges of contemporary Continental metaphysics. The general implication of this assessment, then, is that it renders Ricoeur's

²To a certain extent, then, the present essay shares the aim of responding to certain postmodern critics of Ricoeur, as Scott-Bauman's (2012), though the focus remains more closely focused on truth than the entirety of Ricoeur's hermeneutical project.

³See, for example, Caputo reiteration of his earlier views (2011: 61).

⁴One might also note that it is just this criticism that stands behind Caputo's more recent critiques of Ricoeurian inspired hermeneutics, such as one finds in Richard Kearney's (2001), (2003), and (2010). In Caputo's (2010) and (2011) he criticizes Kearney along very similar lines.

⁵For this point see Alain Badiou's statement in (2006) as well as his later reaffirmation of the point in the notes to (2009: 516–7).

⁶To mention just two other writers, both of whom are sympathetic to Ricoeur, one might consider the way that T.M. Seebohm understands his work only to have extended a "hermeneutics of polysemy and latent meaning," but returns continually to Gadamer as the more serious innovator (2005: 18). Christopher Smith, in a similar vein, argues that Ricoeur's work on the relation of self and Other is but a restricted account of Gadamer's more pervasive sense of "*Zughörigkeit*" in his (2012) essay.

thought obsolete, unfruitful for any serious or “live” philosophical conversation on the most profound philosophical topics.

In response, I hope to demonstrate that Ricoeur’s account of hermeneutics is fundamentally distinct from that form developed by Heidegger and extended in Gadamer’s work. It is committed to the “infinite” dimension of human understanding, rather than to its finitude. The result not only enables it to countenance the occurrence of events, but also does so in a way that I believe makes it more viable than Heidegger’s own position. To make my case, I aim to go to the heart of what constitutes hermeneutic philosophy: the hermeneutic circle. What I hope to show is that Ricoeur transforms the sense of this circle through a dislocation of both the origin (*Ursprung*) and status of truth. In short, I argue that one can witness the fundamental cleavage between pre – and post-Ricoeurian hermeneutics if one attends to truth’s itinerary from *alētheia* to attestation. Because I aim to distinguish Ricoeur from Heidegger, I begin by recalling what I take to be a broad consensus among Heidegger scholars concerning the status of truth as *alētheia*.⁷

Truth and Finitization

Heidegger’s account of truth is plangently counter-intuitive. His statement on the matter is that “Truth is un-truth” (1989: 351/245). This is the formulation that one finds in *Contributions to Philosophy*, but it retains a number of important continuities with his earlier work. In what follows, I plan to lay out as clearly as I can what structure is at work in Heidegger’s account of truth, a structure that I take to be common to both the early and later Heidegger, and which might be called, following Heidegger himself, the structure of finitization [*Verendlichung*].

Because Heidegger’s account of truth as *alētheia* is complex, I begin with a brief outline of his argument. Heidegger finds the common account of truth, truth understood as correctness, inadequate to account for itself. This account of truth opposes rather than correlates truth and untruth. Ordinarily, one thinks of statements such as “ $2+2=4$ ” as true, while others such as “ $7+9=13$ ” as false. In §44 of *Being and Time* Heidegger articulates this sense of truth in three points: “1. The ‘locus’ of truth is the proposition (judgment). 2. The essence of truth lies in the ‘agreement’ of the judgment with its object. 3. Aristotle, the father of logic, attributed truth to judgment

⁷There are, of course, limits to any consensus. In the following one will find that the presentation of Heidegger has sided with Thomas Sheehan’s three-level account of Heidegger’s principle focus as opposed to William Richardson’s two-level account. For a clear account of the former, see Sheehan’s (2001) essay, for the latter one can of course look to Richardson’s (2003) especially the first chapter of the second part over the essay “On the Essence of Truth.” There is a rather deep divide here, but both sides of this divide agree that what Heidegger was trying to “dig underneath” the discourse of the positive sciences, and that finitude characterizes what he was after in both his early and late work. These are the only points of consensus necessary for the current project, though I happen to think that Sheehan is correct on this score, so that the exposition that follows makes use of his account.

as its primordial locus, he also started the definition of truth as ‘agreement’” (1972: 214/198). What makes some judgments true and others false, then, is that in the true ones there is an *adaequatio mentis et rei* (correspondence of mind and reality) while in the false ones there is not. In his essay “On the Essence of Truth” Heidegger notes that this correspondence has traditionally been considered in two ways: either as *adaequatio intellectus ad rem* (correspondence of understanding to reality) or *adaequatio rei ad intellectum* (correspondence of reality to understanding). But both “concepts of the essence of *veritas* have continually in view a conforming to ... [*Sichrichten nach ...*], and hence think truth as *correctness* [*Richtigkeit*]” (1976: 76/138). What Heidegger wants to question is not whether one or another account of truth as *adaequatio* is the right one, but the essence of truth itself.⁸ These accounts of truth do not tell us what truth is, or why it should be understood as some sort of correspondence; they presuppose that point.

To remedy this deficiency, he proceeds by way of regression, by way of demonstrating what is presupposed in the ordinary account of truth as correctness, to a deeper level that would answer what the essence of truth is. There are several steps to this regression, and Heidegger changes the character of these steps at different points in his career, but he moves ultimately to demonstrate that truth understood as *a-lētheia* is the opening, the clearing of Being (*Sein*). It is a process of Being’s happening [*Ereignis*].

To be clear, Heidegger maintains that there are three distinct aspects of being. The most ordinary sense of beings [*Seindes*] concerns such items as coffee mugs, pencils and books. The second aspect concerns the Being [*Sein*] of these beings [*Seindes*]. If I decide that I have not enough room on my desk, so that I need to collect all my pens and pencils, I could use my coffee mug as a pencil holder by putting all these loose items in it. In doing so, I have transformed its *Sein* from a coffee mug to a pencil holder. This example is a little misleading, however, since what Heidegger has in mind by *Sein* is not a subjective property of beings, but the epochal totality of all possibilities of such beings. When I decide to use my coffee mug as a pencil holder, I take it *as* something else, but the range of the possibilities I can take it as depend crucially on the epoch in which I live. It is a feature of our contemporary epoch, for example, that I can take certain items *as* a space shuttle. This possibility is something that was unavailable to an ancient Greek. More fundamentally, Heidegger argues that our contemporary period standardly takes beings *as* having a technological mode of Being [*Sein*], and he is concerned with this because it closes off the most fundamental aspect of Being; it forecloses even asking after the meaning of Being. What he is most interested in, then, is not the epochal Being of beings, but the meaning of Being, its clearing [*Lichtung*] or truth [*a-lētheia*], as he later writes. This is a third thing, distinct from the other two senses of being. In the *Contributions* he discusses it as the event, the *Ereignis*, since it concerns the shifting

⁸Heidegger also takes care at this point to show how the sense of truth as *adaequatio* only makes sense within the framework of Medieval philosophical-theology. The deconstructive suggestion, then, is that any borrowing of this notion without critically addressing the differences is bound to be confused from the beginning.

from one epochal totality of Being to another. In this way it is a radical and unpredictable shift in the meaning of *Sein* itself; it is that which twists-free [*Herausdrehung*] from the history of Western metaphysics, which, since Plato's discussion of truth in book seven of the *Republic*, has forgotten that there is something more fundamental than *Sein* itself.

If truth as correctness concerns the correspondence of understanding to beings at the most superficial level, *alētheia* concerns the truth (or perhaps better: truth-ing) of the happening [*Ereignis*] of the epochal shift in Being. Assessing this sense of truth alone can answer what truth really is. This task is something Heidegger accomplishes by regressively arguing back to two more fundamental levels of truth than truth as correctness. Such a double regression is evident in both his early and late work. What changes is the character of the second regression. I move, now, to the specifics of Heidegger's arguments, and begin with the account he provides in *Being and Time*.

Heidegger's argument in the last section of the first division of *Being and Time* (§44) proceeds by way of a double regress. First, he argues regressively from the common account of truth as correctness to an account that follows Husserl's exposition of meaning-fulfilling intentions in the *Logical Investigations*. His guiding question here is: "what does the term 'agreement' mean in general" (1972: 215/199)? In other words, how do *intellectus* and *res* meet? To give the question a more concrete form, Heidegger proposes the following situation. Suppose a person with his back to the wall makes the true assertion, "The picture on the wall is hanging askew," and then turns around and confirms the statement. What occurs in this demonstration, or with respect to what do the assertion and the thing known agree? Following Husserl, Heidegger argues that it cannot be with respect to a representation of a state of affairs, a mental picture of the picture, since "[w]hat one has in mind is the real picture, and nothing else" (1972: 217/201). Any representational account simply falsifies the intentional character of consciousness. What comes to be demonstrated "is solely the being-discovered of the being itself, *that being* in the how of its being discovered" (1972: 218/201). This is to say, the adequation that comes to be demonstrated is an agreement between what is meant and the thing itself, not something psychic and something physical. In Heidegger's words: "This is confirmed by the fact that what is stated (that is, the being itself) shows itself *as the very same thing*. Confirmation means *the being's showing itself in its self-sameness*" (ibid.). What the demonstration demonstrates about the assertion is its being-uncovered [*entdeckend-sein*], the assertion "lets beings 'be seen' [*apophasis*] in their discoveredness" (ibid.).

Yet Heidegger does not stop at this Husserlian point. Rather, he indicates a second point of regress from truth as being-uncovered to the ground of the possibility of such truth, which he identifies with his previous analysis of the worldhood of the world. He writes: "Being-true as discovering is in turn ontologically possible only on the basis of being-in-the-world. This phenomenon, in which we recognize a basic constitution of Da-sein, is the *foundation* of the primordial phenomenon of truth" (1972: 219/201). While Heidegger does not fully carry out the move in *Being and Time* (it was to be completed in the unfinished Division III), one can nevertheless

understand what is indicated. Briefly, in order for Dasein to comport itself to beings, such as the picture hanging on the wall, in such a way that they are uncovered in *apophysis*, the world must already be disclosed. Commenting on this passage, John Sallis notes that this is the case for two reasons: “because world is that within which things can be intended, meant, as in assertion; and because world is that from out of which things can show themselves in such a way that a demonstration of an assertion becomes possible” (1995: 79). One could take a step further, reading this statement in light of what comes later in division two. Since the fundamental mode of being-in-the-world is care [*Sorge*], and care is in turn to be understood in terms of temporality (§65), truth must ultimately be understood in terms of temporality.

In his *Contributions to Philosophy* Heidegger denounces his attempt to account for truth in *Being and Time* and related works, such as his lectures on *The History of the Concept of Time*, since these attempts “had to remain inadequate, because they were always still carried through by *opposition* and so were still oriented to what they opposed, thus making it impossible to know the essence of truth by way of its ground” (1989: 351/246).⁹ Looking to his statement in “On the Essence of Truth” it becomes clear that what Heidegger has in mind with this self-critique is that he was off track in the second regression, that is by regressing beyond Husserl’s account through his own existential analytic. Because in *Being and Time* Heidegger never succeeded in fully separating time from its origin in Dasein, this move repeated the structure of Kant’s *Critical* project if not its content.¹⁰ In the essay “On the Essence of Truth” the matter is quite different.

Like his approach in *Being and Time*, Heidegger again begins with common sense, and asks after that to which *intellectus* and *res* are supposed to accord. His answer is equally phenomenological: accord is only possible because the statement is not an utterly differently thing, but a moment of comporting oneself to the thing about which the statement is made. “But the statement,” he writes, “relates ‘itself’ to this thing in that it presents [*vor-stellt*] it and says of what is presented how, according to the particular perspective that guides it, it is disposed” (1976: 79/141). He then undertakes a second regress to what grounds this phenomenological openness of comportment. His answer this time, however, is that freedom grounds this comportment. Why freedom and not his Dasein-analytic? Because comportment requires a certain kind of engagement in the openness that lets beings show themselves. “To free oneself,” Heidegger writes, “for a binding directedness is possible only by *being free* for what is opened up in an open region. Such being free points to the heretofore uncomprehended essence of freedom” (1976: 81/142). Still, this account seems to make truth a matter of human caprice. To clarify why this is not so, Heidegger must turn to address the essence of freedom.

⁹ Translation modified.

¹⁰ For an excellent account (in English) of the difficulties Heidegger encountered on this score, see chapter two of John Sallis’ (1990).

Heidegger's account here moves through several steps, but the heart of his argument pursues the following points.¹¹ "To let be ... means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself. Western thinking in its beginning conceived this open region as *ta alētheia*, the unconcealed" (1976: 89/148). Freedom, then, is submitted to unconcealment in the sense of *alētheia*. This point corrects the account of truth in *Being and Time*, since the most fundamental level of truth now exceeds Dasein. Yet this move also introduces the non-essence of truth into its essence, since the non-essence of truth does not first refer to human incapacity or some form of privation; "rather, concealment preserves what is most proper to *alētheia* as its own" (1976: 89/148). This point illuminates what Heidegger means when he writes in the *Contributions* that "truth is untruth." The statement, which Heidegger admits is hyperbolic, is meant to emphasize this correlation between truth and untruth. Taking a moment to spell out the implications of understanding truth in this way (i.e., as the correlation of truth and untruth), Heidegger notes that the concealing aspect of truth, its non-essence, is "older than every openedness of this or that being" (ibid.). The term "older" here means that it exceeds the tradition of metaphysics, so that Heidegger is here indicating a way to twist from that history. The point that Heidegger makes is that this correlation (truth is untruth) occurs as a process, as a truth-ing. This is, of course, what is emphasized by Heidegger's statement that "*the essence of truth is the truth of essence*" (1976: 96/153). The truth of essence, which Heidegger maintains is the subject of this statement, means that truth essentially unfolds [*wesen*]. And by truth he means both unconcealment (clearing) and concealment (as both mystery and errancy), which taken together can be written as *a-lētheia*. In short, this play of un-concealing unfolds, and it unfolds, as a note to the text mentions, in *Ereignis*, in the structuring of epochal meaning.

How are we to bring the early and later Heidegger together—if at all? In one sense, they clearly cannot be brought together. Heidegger drops the priority of the Dasein-analytic for his later account. Still, both accounts retain a three-leveled thesis, and both accounts refer the most fundamental level to a kind of activity: temporality as the fundamental meaning of *Sorge*, and *a-lētheia* as the strife of concealment and unconcealment. I venture that there is a word that connects them: finitude, or better *Verendlichkeit* (finitization). This is a term that Heidegger uses in his lecture "What is Metaphysics?" to characterize the most profound aspect of metaphysics, and I think it can bring out not only the continuity in Heidegger's project, but also (and more importantly for the present essay) the structure of the event, of that third thing that is neither beings nor Being.

This lecture, rather (in)famously, is concerned with the nothing. Much like the works examined above, one finds in this piece that Heidegger undertakes to demonstrate a double regression: one that moves from the object of scientific investigation, namely beings, *ta physika*, to what is "beyond" them, and another that moves to the verge of this very metaphysical transcendence, to its structur-ing, to its happening.

¹¹I direct the interested reader to chapter six of John Sallis' (1995) for a careful account of Heidegger's full argument.

The first regression is from science to the nothing. Science, Heidegger writes, is concerned with what is “and nothing further” (1976: 3/84). This leaves to metaphysics, what might be beyond physical beings, only nothing. Yet, metaphysics is not concerned with the nothing in any indeterminate way, but insofar as it is revealed in the mood of anxiety: “[i]n anxiety beings as a whole become superfluous ... the nothing makes itself known with beings in beings expressly as a slipping away of the whole” (1976: 10-11/90). This way of taking beings reveals that only if Dasein is capable of not always being absorbed in beings, can it comport itself to them otherwise, can it even comport itself to them in a scientific way. “Da-sein,” thus, “means: being held out into the nothing” (1976: 12/91). Da-sein transcends being in its very existence (*Dasein*). It turns out, then, that the nothing is included in the objects of scientific investigation *as* what is excluded from such investigation. Moreover, “[t]he nothing does not merely serve as the counterconcept of beings; rather, it originally belongs to their essential unfolding as such,” for without the nothing, one could not even begin scientific investigation (*ibid.*).

Heidegger regresses yet one more time, “beyond” the nothing to the nothing-ing. He writes: “[w]e are so finite that we cannot even bring ourselves originally before the nothing through our own determination and will. So abysmally [*abgründig*] does finitization [*Verendlichung*] entrench itself that our most proper and deepest limitation [*Endlichkeit*] refuses to yield to our freedom” (1976: 118/93).¹² The word *Verendlichung* suggests a process of finitude, the way of the nothing’s occurrence, happening, or *Ereignis* in the language of the *Contributions*. The structure of the *Ereignis*, of the nothing’s finitude-izing, thus has two facets. First, it is included in what is, in being, as that which is excluded from it but nevertheless structures their essential unfolding. Second, it is an unpredictable occurrence, something that happens to Dasein, and is not willed.

This structure brings together Heidegger’s earlier and later statements on truth, for in both cases he is not only after the truth(ing) of that third thing that is different from both beings and Being, but he also characterizes it in relation to this structure of finitudizing, which is a temporal occurrence. This most fundamental sense of temporality is finitude happening as the unpredictable shifting in the Being of beings (e.g. the shift from a pre-technological mode of approach the world to our technological mode). In *Being and Time*, recall the role that death plays: it puts a limitation [*Endlichkeit*] to one’s possibilities, so that one undergoes angst and perhaps projects a future with anticipatory resoluteness. In that case one authentically appropriates one’s historical possibilities, and this is important because it enables one to recognize the character of the Being of beings. The end (death), as a result, is not the terminus of life (external and outside it), but distributed throughout life (internal and constitutive). Here one finds the structure of included exclusion. Heidegger of course expresses the same structure with truth in his later thought: untruth is not external and outside truth, but an essential component of truth (as its non-essence). In his early thought, Dasein’s finitude as temporality is supposed to

¹²Page 15 of original publication. The significance of this statement is noted in Michel Harr’s (1993) and Leonard Lawlor’s (2004).

take the role of that third thing in *Being and Time*, the structuring of possibilities that make up historicity. Yet in his later work, Heidegger abandons this project because the structure of the Dasein-analytic ties its happening to Dasein, thus repeating the Kantian critical (and hence metaphysical) project. The later shift to the nothing's finitudizing on its own, such that it appropriates man and Being [*Sein*] avoids this difficulty, but it retains the same two-part structure: (1) the included exclusion of death/truth, and (2) unpredictable happening/shifting in the Being of beings.

The relation between the earlier and later Heidegger on this score is critical for the present argument. If accurate, it suggests that when Ricoeur criticizes Heidegger for the structure of the argument at work in his early thought (he does not much address his later thought), Ricoeur's critique hits both Heidegger's early and later thought. Should it fail to be accurate, then perhaps there may still be other reasons for taking up Ricoeur's hermeneutic path.

Beyond the Hermeneutics of Finitude

In order to address Ricoeur's marked difference from Heidegger, I pause to consider two arguments that Heideggerians have been unable to address well, if at all, and which might motivate a turn from Heidegger to Ricoeur. The first of these is a generalization of Ricoeur's own critique of Heidegger, and the second is a distillation of one of Alain Badiou's recent criticisms. For the sake of clarity, I call these arguments *The Regression Problem* and *The Romantic Problem*, respectively.

The Regression Problem

This problem is one that Ricoeur produced in response to Heidegger's thought in the 1960s, and which he continued to maintain throughout his career.¹³ Rather than merely repeat Ricoeur, I would like here to expand his points somewhat, and clarify what I take to be its central moments. It has two parts.

First, whenever one argues that a level of discourse, or being, or anything at all is reflectively *prior* to another by way of regression, one's argument must have two parts. One must argue from some domain *x* back to a prior domain *y*, *and* one must also show how *y* explains the posterior level *x*. Without this latter move, one could argue regressively to *any* conceivable prior level. For example, if one did not need to show how this "prior" level explains the posterior level, and does so in a way better than competing claims, including those that argue that no prior level is needed, then one could argue that occult forces (spirits of the undead and the like) are "prior" to the claims of modern natural science.

¹³The essay that I have in mind in particular is "Existence and Hermeneutics," in (1974: 3–24).

Second, regressive arguments have their place, but do not apply to the sciences. No one can establish the required priority to the “positive” sciences, because the “positive” sciences *are not static*. The best that one could accomplish would be to articulate the priority of some domain relative to the scientific conclusions of one’s time. Yet, because it is widely recognized that scientific thought undergoes radical (Kuhnian-like) shifts, one will never be in a position to determine in advance the meaning or epistemic warrant for *all possible* claims scientists make. One thus cannot claim to have argued regressively to what is prior to all scientific *inquiry*, but only (in the best case) to some domain prior to a specific set of scientific claims. The route to prioritization, which would dig under the discourse of the “positive” sciences once and for all, is thus blocked. It must instead be acknowledged that the very *aim* of these regressive arguments is incoherent when applied to the sciences; it is a remnant from the Enlightenment, or at least some form of positivism, when it was still assumed both that the content of scientific knowledge was accretional and unrevisable, and that the character of its warrant was static as well.

The implications of this argument for Heidegger are profound. It demonstrates that all arguments that claim to regress to another domain of reflection prior to logic, mathematics, and science fail to do so. Heidegger’s account of truth, which is established by way of regression to a domain doubly prior to the sciences, is quite directly implicated.

The Romantic Problem

In his essay “Philosophy and Mathematics,” Alain Badiou argues that the disjunction between philosophic thought and mathematics, certainly typified in Heidegger’s thought (for whom neither science nor math think), turns on a commitment to “the Romantic speculative gesture” (2008a: 95). While Badiou fingers Hegel as the ultimate culprit, the Romantic structure that he discerns in Heidegger’s thought may be distilled as follows. This gesture has two parts. First, it establishes the existence of some sphere of cognition (broadly construed) which stands opposed to what is called “reason.” Next, the Romantic thinker subordinates what is called “reason” to this alternative sphere. One could think, for example, of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s work, wherein he first separates feeling and reason, and then subordinates the latter to the former. Badiou’s point is that this move allows a philosopher to disentangle mathematical thought and philosophy, or more broadly “reason” and the most fundamental aims of philosophical thought.

Both Heidegger and Hegel may be understood to make such a Romantic gesture. In Heidegger’s early thought, Dasein’s understanding (*Verstehen*) is fundamentally about the world, and is prior to the discourse of logic and mathematics. In his later thought the appropriation of man and Being (*Sein*) by the event (*Ereignis*) is explicitly prior to logical thought. For Hegel, one need only note that the whole point of his *Science of Logic* is to articulate a kind of logic that is broader than mathematical

and logical reasons, and which in fact embeds the categorical logic of his day within this larger logic.

One might wonder: just what is wrong with this gesture? Why cannot Heidegger and Hegel argue that there exists some form cognition that is prior to logic and mathematics, in the sense that these latter are derivative and not fundamental for philosophical reflection? The Badiouian response is that it (i) *presupposes* what is meant by “reason,” usually along the lines of something calculative, instrumental, and closed—a rather Leibnizian ideal, and (ii) that this presupposition is untenable if one reflects more carefully on those practices that supposedly typify this kind of reasoning, such as logic, mathematics, and science.

One of the major efforts of Badiou’s two major works, *Being and Event* and *Logic of Worlds*, is to demonstrate just how non-calculative, anti-instrumental, open, and just plain thought-provoking mathematical logic is. His basic supposition is that mathematics, specifically the abstract algebras known as set theory and category theory, capture all that can be said about reality. In a line: mathematics is ontology. Yet, even if one makes the assumption, as Badiou does, that set theory and classical Frege-Russell logic are capable of capturing all intelligible relations of the existing world, it still turns out that the Leibnizian ideals of reason prove unrealizable. It is important for Badiou that these are not philosophical claims, but conclusions that mathematicians themselves proved about the very character of our best abstract algebras.

The foregoing can be stated more precisely with a bit of technical terminology. Badiou’s specific point concerns the significance of the continuum hypothesis. Even if one assumes the *standard* axioms of Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory with the axiom of choice, then it still turns out that (given certain restrictions) Easton’s theorem shows that the difference between any two subsequent transfinite cardinals is as large as one *chooses*, provided that one’s chosen size is larger than the first cardinal.¹⁴ In short, the Leibnizian dream of total closure, which Kurt Gödel was the last great thinker to pursue, proves to be unrealizable under what was traditionally taken to be the best circumstances.

It is thus by making precisely these ontological assumptions that Badiou is able to demonstrate that contingency is a necessity, that errancy is written “into the heart of what can be said of being” (2005: 278). Being, what there is, *must* have an irrecoverable excess, and this excess is what always allows for intervention, radical change, what might legitimately be called events.

Most critically, what the forgoing means is that there is no *motivation* for the Romantic speculative gesture, no reason to *want* to circumvent logic. For if one is able to accomplish all that was desired of feeling, or of pre-comprehensive understanding, or of dialectical reasoning, etc., by sticking with classical reason alone, why go through all the trouble of articulating such an alternative sphere in the first place? Why even try to oppose Heideggerian understanding [*Verstand*] to rational discourse, if rational discourse is able to accomplish just what was desired of

¹⁴Badiou spells this point out clearly in “Meditation Twenty-Six” of (2005), especially subsection seven on Easton’s theorem.

understanding [*Verstand*] in the first place—and furthermore, is able to do so without making highly problematic and unsubstantiated assumptions about the character of rationality?¹⁵

To sum up, *The Romantic Problem* argues, first, that human cognition (even under the best circumstances) is incomplete, so that, second, all the attempts by philosophers to circumvent the reach of “reason” are both obviated and made questionable in their results. Its main aim is to question the *motivation* for a commitment to finitude, but it also questions the adequacy of the characterization of reason one finds in the work of Heidegger (or even Hegel).

It seems to me that scholars of Heidegger’s thought have not appreciated the depth of these arguments yet. The best that one finds is a possible response to the latter of these difficulties. One could argue that Heidegger’s account of hermeneutics, at least in *Being and Time*, does account for precisely the internal fissuring or “errancy” of reason by way of his account of “fundamental concepts.” He simply digs beneath those too. For example, John Caputo, in (2000) argues that the fundamental concepts that Heidegger mentions in §3 of *Being and Time* can be construed as paradigms, and that what Heidegger even suggests there is a notion of scientific crisis very similar to Thomas Kuhn.¹⁶ It might thus be argued that Heidegger recognizes precisely what Badiou is addressing, and would maintain that there is no problem with it, save that Badiou thinks that his concern with ontic sciences can substitute for the proper task of fundamental ontology.

This response, however, meets at least four of its own difficulties. First, as Caputo clearly indicates, making such an argument requires that one admit as wrong all of the later Heidegger’s work on technology, typified by an account of reason as “cybernetics,” art as a kind of saving power, and their relation to truth.¹⁷ This is certainly a high price to pay, and given Heidegger’s self-critique of his early work, it borders on inconsistency. Second, it is not clear that Heidegger’s account can be extended to anything other than an early Kuhnian account of science, which has largely been discredited. The specific emphasis on crises makes it incompatible with, for example, Larry Laudan’s reticulated model, and it is only this latter kind of model that is viable any more, given the many advances in the philosophy of science after Kuhn.¹⁸ Third, the response is straightforwardly inconsistent with the account of truth provided in §44 of *Being and Time*, which assumes a simple correspondence between the proposition and the thing (not a paradigm or scientific aim). Caputo’s account, then, is not only incompatible with the later Heidegger; it is also inconsistent with the arguments of *Being and Time* itself. Fourth and finally, it does nothing to respond to the structural difficulty Ricoeur identifies, i.e., *The*

¹⁵Making just this point is one of the major aims of Badiou’s (2008). See especially the introduction, “Number Must Be Thought.”

¹⁶See especially the essay “Hermeneutics and the Natural Sciences: Heidegger, Science, and Essentialism,” (2000: 151–71).

¹⁷For Heidegger’s account of “cybernetics” see especially (2001) days July 9, 1964, May 14, 1965, and November 23, 1965.

¹⁸See Laudan’s (1984) for further development.

Regression Problem. With these difficulties noted, it makes sense to look elsewhere for an account of hermeneutic truth, and this is why I now turn to Ricoeur's breakthrough.

Infinite Hermeneutics

The prevalent misconception of Ricoeur would suggest that if Heidegger faces difficulties, especially insofar as his hermeneutics is committed to a sense of finitude (as *Verendlichkeit*), then so too must Ricoeur. This would seem to be so for at least two reasons. First, as Ricoeur states repeatedly, he appropriates the Heideggerian hermeneutic circle, which develops it from Dilthey's epistemological focus and founds it on the ontological.¹⁹ If Ricoeur appropriates Heidegger's hermeneutic circle, and if that account is characterized by finitude, then Ricoeur's hermeneutics must be as well. Second, when Ricoeur addresses attestation, he is clear that its opposite is not untruth but suspicion. Furthermore, he argues that "[s]uspicion is also the path *toward* and crossing *within* attestation. It haunts attestation, as false testimony haunts true testimony" (1992: 302). Suspicion, then, seems to function in relation to truth just as un-truth functions in relation to truth in Heidegger's account of *alētheia*.

The reason neither of these points hold, so that it does make sense to look to Ricoeur's thought as a solution to the difficulties facing Heidegger's, is that the prevalent misconception of Ricoeur must decontextualize his statements in order to maintain such a reading. When viewed in their context, one finds that Ricoeur breaks *entirely* with the position of finitude, so that his reflective hermeneutics may more adequately be understood as an infinite hermeneutics. In order to make my case, I begin by outlining the general features of Ricoeur's hermeneutics.

The most important point to understand about Ricoeur's hermeneutics is that it is *not* primarily to be understood in terms of the ontological "de-regionalization" that Ricoeur discusses in essays such as "The Task of Hermeneutics" in (1994). Rather, as Ricoeur makes clear in his exchange with the neurobiologist Jean-Pierre Changeaux, his hermeneutics hails from a three-fold philosophic heritage: "'reflective philosophy,' 'phenomenology,' and 'hermeneutics'" (2000: 4). To use Ricoeur's famous horticultural metaphor, the stem of hermeneutics must be grafted onto the tree of phenomenology, and for Ricoeur the "hand" that does the grafting is reflective philosophy. The lynchpin of his hermeneutics, then, turns on his use of reflective philosophy, and he takes that philosophy primarily from Jean Nabert.

There is one seminal essay in which Ricoeur lays out just in what ways he is committed to Nabert's thought: "Nabert on Act and Sign" in (1974). There he argues that reflective philosophy is committed to the following points. To begin, one must recognize that there is a distinction between (first-person) consciousness and

¹⁹This is, of course, the whole point of the second section of Ricoeur's "The Task of Hermeneutics" in (1991: 53–74).

the representation of that consciousness in signs. There is, in other words, a difference between my perception that my notepad is on my desk and the representation of that perception as: “my notepad is on my desk.” Second, Ricoeur does not take this representation by signs to be a barrier to truth. Instead, he understands it to complete conscious perception, even though and especially *because* it now gives rise to the need for interpretation. Traversing the conflict of interpretations, then, enables one to return to the conscious act in a renewed way, without one’s original naïveté. In this third step, then, one traces the referent of the signifying representation back to its ontological ground. Still, one cannot suppose that the return to consciousness is final. Rather, as Ricoeur writes in his early essay “Truth and Falsehood,” the “*One* is too distant a reward; it is an evil temptation” (2007: 165). The result of this movement, then, is “a sort of dialectic with a postponed synthesis,” in which the moment of refiguration, the return to the ontological referent by way of the conflict of interpretations, is only ever a provisional conclusion (2007: 11).

Within this context it becomes clear that “finitude” for Ricoeur, whenever he discusses it, *means lack of self-coincidence*, not Heideggerian *Verendlichkeit*, and neither is it defined in strictly temporal terms (1986: 1). This lack requires a *positive* objectification of conscious acts in meaningful signs, which must then be recovered hermeneutically. It is this course of recovery that one finds in early works such as *Fallible Man*, and late works such as *Oneself as Another* and *The Course of Recognition*. And it is for these reasons that Ricoeur writes: “we dissociate ourselves to some extent from the contemporary tendency to make finitude the global characteristic of human reality” (ibid.).

Truth, attestation, initially finds its place within this framework at two levels, the epistemological and ontological, though its completion requires a traversal through meaningful signification in action, personal identity, ethics, and political life. For both levels, Ricoeur argues that the most fundamental sense of truth (attestation) tracks events in meaning, much like Heidegger. Unlike Heidegger, however, in the course of his career Ricoeur developed three separate models for these events in meaning: the symbol, the text, and translation. These are models in meaning that Ricoeur developed in relation to the human sciences, though he always maintained that a similar approach might be possible with the natural sciences.²⁰ Events in meaning for him are found by engaging with the sciences, by going through them, rather than by “digging under” them.

This point follows rather straightforwardly from the criticism of Heidegger raised in *The Regression Problem*. One consequence of that argument is that Ricoeur’s account of truth not only can, but must address the social and natural sciences. Since the force of the argument suggests that hermeneutics is only possible by taking a long road of traversal *through* meaning at an ontic level, rather than by way of Heidegger’s “short road,” which attempts to dig under these sciences, engagement with the meaning of scientific claims is inevitable. A second conse-

²⁰Don Idhe has developed this avenue rather extensively. See his (1993), (1998), and (2002) in particular.

quence is a dislocation of the origin [*Ursprung*] of truth. Since truth in its most originary sense cannot be located beneath the sciences, it must be located within their discourses. Ricoeur's proposal is to find that origin as an *event of meaning* occasioned by polysemy, either at the level of the sentence, the text, or through translation.

A second departure from Heidegger on the topic of truth concerns the structure of events: in Ricoeur's thought that structure is three-fold, as opposed to Heidegger's two-fold account of events. It is this three-fold structure that qualifies his thought as positively infinite in its orientation, and not simply not finite (in the sense of *Verendlichkeit*). The three-fold structure of events of meaning is something that Ricoeur carries with him throughout his career, but he announces it first in his early *The Symbolism of Evil*. This work, as its title suggests, develops and makes use of the model of the symbol by focusing on "evil" as a paradigmatic symbol. Ricoeur outlines a three stage process for the recovery/completion [*aufhebung*] of symbolic meaning as follows:

[1] I wager that I shall have a better understanding of man and of the bond between the being of man and the being of all beings if I follow the *indication* of symbolic thought. [2] That wager then becomes the task of *verifying* my wager and saturating it, so to speak, with intelligibility. [3] In return, the task transforms my wager: in betting *on* the significance of the symbolic world, I bet at the same time *that* my wager will be restored to me in the power of reflection, in the element of coherent discourse (1967: 355).

To summarize, this process has three stages: a wager, verification, and transformation. The wager itself is a wager on symbolic meaning, that is to say, meaning that is not present in the semantics of ordinary, dictionary sense. To use Badiou's terminology, symbolic meaning "in-exists" in the structure of sense; it exists in the structure of univocal semantics precisely as that which is excluded from it, just like Heidegger's nothing exists in beings as what is excluded from them. Because a symbol does not exist as something literally meaningful, one can imagine logical positivists dismissing the investigation of "evil" in the Bible as nonsense. It is because of this inexistence, then, that one must wager that symbolic meaning (or for Ricoeur's later work: textual, or translative meaning) does exist. Second, one must *act*, one must do something to bring about this meaning, and this is the process of verification. The long detour through the conflict of interpretations just is this process of verification, of truth-making. Finally, if successful, this process will have brought a new kind of meaning into existence, so that one's wager is transformed and the world of dictionary sense is displaced/completed. This is a structure that Ricoeur maintains for all his models of sense; it holds just as much for the new sense provided by symbols as it does for that provided by texts, or for that provided by translation.

The epistemic dimension of attestation already establishes what can properly be called an infinite hermeneutics, since the three-fold process of wager, verification, and transformation already initiates a form of inquiry that is infinite not in the sense that it continues indefinitely, but in the sense that it breaks utterly with established

semantic sense. Symbols cannot be translated into univocal language, metaphor emerges only from the ruins of literal non-sense, and the text only begins by its distanciation from the event of speech. These qualify as events of meaning precisely because one will never be able to determine their existence through a critique of meaning or sense beforehand. They shatter the pretensions of any such critical enterprise that would seek to assess their limits in an apriori way, and equally any claim to some form of pre-comprehension that only needs explication. In appropriating Heidegger's hermeneutic circle, Ricoeur irrevocably transforms it, and the role suspicion plays is only as a second part on the way to a third productive part without which one has not yet finished the process of truth. Both concerns that were raised earlier, then, have been answered: Ricoeur neither tries to circumvent the sciences (*The Regression Problem*), nor does he subordinate scientific meaning to some other form (*The Romantic Problem*). Events of meaning are ruptures in literal meaning, but they are sustained only by our intervention, by traversing the conflict of interpretations. Furthermore, if they are successful, they transform our sense of literal meaning. This last point brings one to the ontological dimension of attestation.

Because it is always possible to follow the referent of any sign to its ontological base, each of these ruptures in the established order of sense (symbolically, textually, translatively) is at the same time a rupture in the order of being. A metaphor emerges out of the literal non-sense of a statement, a text from the fixation of meaning and distanciation from the original author.²¹ In each case, utterly new and unpredictable forms of meaning and being are brought forth. Events, in short, have not only epistemic but also ontological facets.

I think these points are enough to indicate how the ontological dimension of attestation functions for Ricoeur. What is attested as semantic polysemy finds an ontological reference, specifically for the project of human capability, and that reference has suggested six ways of being-able. The rifts in meaning from which these conclusions emerge are utterly novel, yet do not entail total chaos. An event of meaning that indicates a *shift* in intelligibility, not a loss of it. Human capability is thus attested in the ways that we all respond to events of meaning, from tragic injustices to the establishment of just institutions, from poetic and religious epiphanies to philosophic ontologies. In brief, since this capacity is only accessible indirectly through the positive objectification of human thought and action, the best one can do is gather the traces of these acts, which were formed in response to events of meaning. It is by preserving the tensions in the conflict of interpretations, then, that one remains most faithful to the event.

²¹ Ricoeur is clearest about the ontological implications of reference for metaphor in chapter eight of (2003). For an equally clear account see Ricoeur's essay "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation" in *From Text to Action* (1994), which model of the text undergirds the account of narrative employed in *Oneself as Another* (1992) and provides a more systematic account of the statements he makes there.

The Future of Hermeneutics

Heidegger and Ricoeur do share some fundamental commitments. Among these is the need to twist free from the metaphysics of presence, from onto-theology, and the view that the best way to do so is by recognizing the role of events in our metaphysical accounts. Likewise, they share a commitment to multiple forms of truth, the most fundamental of which is the truth of events. Where they differ concerns the specific details of this account. For Heidegger, events have a two-fold structure: the nothing is included in the totality of beings as what is excluded from them. Yet, the nothing also nothings, it happens [*ereignet*], it structures the Being of beings in an unpredictable way. *A-lētheia* is the truth of the event, and it is *prior* to the truth science, the sense of truth that is measured by its *adaequatio*. For Ricoeur, events have a three-fold structure. They emerge from an inexistent point of meaning, whether a symbol, a text, or a translation. Because their meaning in-exists, one must wager on that inexistence (part one), and then undertake to verify that meaning by traversing the conflict of interpretations (part two). Finally, (part three) if one is successful one may trace the referent to its ontological base, which transforms the realms of meaning and being. Truth as attestation is the arc of this process; it is the arc of wager and response to an event of meaning/being. Attestation *is* a sense of truth that is different from the sense of truth that one finds in the sciences, but it is not deeper or prior to them. Rather, attestation is the sense of truth that one achieves only by traversing these sciences.

One way to express the differences between Heidegger's hermeneutics and Ricoeur's is to suggest that the former's is a hermeneutics of (radical) finitude, while the latter's is an infinite hermeneutics. Both Heidegger and Ricoeur share a basic commitment about the character of events, namely that they are occurrences that shatter the limits of cognition and being, shatter the pretensions of searching for the boundaries of these supposedly finite domains, because their occurrence just means that there are no fixed *a priori* boundaries for these domains. Heidegger's finitude, then, is not Kantian finitude, but a radical finitude—a finitude that happens *Verendlichung*. It tries to “dig beneath” the sciences and makes use of a two part structure, which brings one to the verge of the event as an unpredictable occurrence. Ricoeur's hermeneutics is infinite not only because it has a three-part structure and because it goes through the sciences. It is infinite primarily because this hermeneutics is defined in terms of bringing the event, the happening that breaks the bounds of finitude, into being. This matter of agency is the third part of his structure (wager, *verification*, transformation) that is different from Heidegger's account. The happening of Heidegger's two part structure is what he calls truth as *alētheia*, while the happening, the arc of the three part structure of Ricoeur's hermeneutics is what he at a certain point in his career calls *attestation*. The different senses of truth, then, define the capital differences between these two forms of hermeneutics.

It seems to me that the most profound relation (and difference) between Heidegger and Ricoeur can be expressed in their opposed choices in how to resolve the critical impasse of *Being and Time*. The difficulty that Heidegger encountered in *Being and*

Time is that it retained the structure of the Kantian critical project insofar as temporality and Dasein remain identified—temporality is the meaning of care [*Sorge*], which is the meaning of Dasein. It thus did not twist-free from the history of metaphysics. In his later work, Heidegger explicitly removed humans from the happening of events, so that there was no longer any problematic identity. Rather humans and Being [*Sein*] are appropriated by the event, which is prior to both. What Heidegger chose to retain in his later work was the structure of finitude, what he rejected was the privileged role of Dasein and the Dasein analytic—and that point explains both the continuity and difference in his work. Ricoeur's thought, by contrast, chooses the other option. He rejects finitude in favor of the infinite, but retains a primary interest in philosophical anthropology, even in the agency of human beings to effect events. This difference, at base, is the difference between finite and infinite hermeneutics.

If this were all there were to the matter, then one would be faced with a sort of groundless choice between two competing conceptions of hermeneutics. Yet, there are two noted problems facing the Heideggerian approach to truth as *alētheia*, namely *The Regression Problem* and *The Romantic Problem*. Because Ricoeur's account of truth as attestation does not suffer these difficulties, it seems to me to be a viable alternative to Heidegger's thought, but one that retains many of his insights. If this is correct, then several significant consequences follow. I would like to close, then, by sketching three of these in the hope of suggesting new avenues for further research.

First, because Heidegger's account of technology was so closely tied to his sense of *alētheia*, a new discourse on science and technology seems to be required. In a very significant way, realizing this consequence has animated Don Ihde's work for the past two decades. But not only has he emerged as something of a lone voice among Ricoeur's students, more work is needed to articulate this consequence. Specifically I have in mind the following. The insight behind Badiou's critique of Romanticism is that what has for more than a century now passed as "calculative" or "instrumental" reason is fundamentally incorrect. What is needed from hermeneutics is thus an answer to the following three concerns. First, we need to try to pin down what exactly the character of this form of reasoning is—in a hermeneutic way. Is there *any* holdout for the old conception, for example in logic, or is even that domain, as certain logicians suggest, subject to the same kind of Evental shifts that Thomas Kuhn first popularized? Second, how is this (re)new(ed) sense of reason related to the human sciences? Finally, this sense of reason cannot pose the threat that Heidegger thought technology embodied, so what exactly is the significance of technological reason for human meaning?

A second consequence of this shift to infinite hermeneutics concerns its implications for the "theological turn" in Continental philosophy. In a characteristically clear essay, Caputo compares the Derridian option for religion favorably to Jean-Luc Marion's. At the heart of the comparison is the following thesis: "My hypothesis in this essay is that phenomenology has recently become religious and it has become so by a series of transgressions I identify as movements of 'hyperbolization.' By this I mean that the religious element enters phenomenology in the form of

a transgression or a passage to the limits [*passage aux frontières*] precisely in order to open phenomenology to God, who exceeds its limits” (2007: 67). Both Derrida and Marion aim to hyperbolize phenomenology, the difference is only that the former does so by attending to what falls under the realm of being—in a khoric way—while the latter does so in a Platonic way (the good beyond being), which Caputo fears militantly subjects religion to philosophy’s demands.²² Ricoeur’s account of truth as attestation, which he argues is closely related to testimony, religious as much as legal, shows that both camps are still operating within the tradition of finitude, and so equally subject to the same critiques as Heidegger was above. The very aim of assessing limits, which might then be transgressed, makes no sense after the turn to infinite thought. It is a “hang-up” of critical philosophy that we must overcome if we are serious about avoiding the metaphysics of presence. This is why the operative term for entering theological discourse for Ricoeur is hope, not faith. Belief is already ingredient to a reasoned response to events in the form of a wager, as noted, so that the principal concern for religious thought must pass through the Nietzschean question: but why would I want to believe? Ricoeur’s role within the theological turn, then, is both unique and poses a serious challenge to the main contenders of that turn—one quite different from Dominique Janicaud’s concern with methodological purity.²³

A final consequence bears on the character of philosophy itself. Since at least Aristotle’s definition of philosophy as the “*epistēmē tēs alētheias*” (the science of truth), it has been clear that what it is that philosophers do concerns truth in some way (1989: 993b20). There are two implications of the turn to infinite thought, it seems to me. First, the pretensions of philosophy to architectonic status are over. Philosophers neither provide the foundation for the sciences, nor do we facilitate their communication, which is only an enervated form of the same project. With the objectivity that is appropriate to it, philosophy is itself a truth procedure like the sciences, but with the distinct aim of responding to events of meaning occasioned both in science and in broader human culture. Second, as Aristotle held that philosophy was a *bios*, a way of life, one can state that philosophy is the way of life that tries to discern new and better ways to live. There is an ethics to attestation, then, which Ricoeur was clear to indicate could not be divorced from its normative moral claims that exist in institutions and lived with other people. One, of course, does not need to be a professional philosopher to take up a philosophical life, but this democratic quality of philosophy puts an injunction on all to continue ethical innovation. Perhaps it is in the promise of a renewed sense of ethics, then, that one can find the most important implications of the turn to infinite hermeneutics.

²² It is noteworthy that the critical response to Caputo’s essay, Matthew Schunke’s (2009) does not contest the ideal that Caputo establishes, only his fear that Marion submits theology to philosophic constraints.

²³ See Janicaud’s essay, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology” in (2000). *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”*: *The French Debate*, trans. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 16–103.

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Constructing Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Theory of Truth

Todd S. Mei

Abstract While there are several moments throughout his career when Ricoeur devotes attention to the problem of truth—for example, in *History and Truth*, his conception of manifestation in his biblical hermeneutics, and when discussing convictions and non-epistemological beliefs in *Oneself as Another*—a more unified theory is never formulated. This can be seen as a somewhat odd omission given the emphasis he places on a hermeneutical form of reasoning. What is a theory of reasoning without a theory of truth? The aim of this chapter is to construct a theory of truth from various texts that span Ricoeur's career. I begin by situating Ricoeur between Heidegger's notion of truth as disclosure and MacIntyre's view that truth is monolithic. I examine how fragility acts as the founding concept for a Ricoeurian theory of truth, which I describe as a kind of "holistic fallibilism." The core of his theory is ethically grounded as opposed to emphasizing ontological disclosure, consistency of beliefs with a metaphysical principle, or the analysis of the reasonableness of statements/propositions.

Keywords Truth • Fallibilism • Holism • Belief • Unity

The whole of Paul Ricoeur's philosophy can be seen as an endeavor to develop an understanding of different orders of truth in relation to a broad conception of the good life—whether in terms of self-understanding, ethics, or politics. Symbolic meaning, narrative identity, non-epistemic belief, and mutuality are some of the significant ways in which Ricoeur seeks to understand truth according to dedicated fields of analysis while at the same time holding in view ontological questions of meaning. Hence, not semiotics, but semantics; not representation, but refiguration; not certainty, but confidence; not shared reasons, but mutual understanding. Integral to this ethical project is Ricoeur's distinction between convictional and epistemic belief, which can be said to form the core of his account of how meaning in existence is grounded in relations with others and is therefore non-reducible to scientific kinds of knowledge and verification. I address this topic elsewhere (Mei 2016), but

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197

in this chapter I want to accomplish something specific in relation to traditional philosophical expectations of what a theory of truth should comprise. What is referred to as a *formal analysis of truth* involves answering such questions as “what is truth?” and “what does it mean for a belief to be true?” It would therefore seem commonsensical that for Ricoeur, who gave so much emphasis to the uniqueness and advantages of the hermeneutical form of reasoning, such an analysis would be an important area of investigation. However, he does not say much directly on this topic.

This chapter is an attempt to provide such an analysis of truth, at least in attenuated form. (Hence, my use of the term “constructing” in the title should be read as a philosophical project underway.) It proposes to construct Ricoeur’s theory of truth in terms of its ethical distinction against the backdrop of two of his contemporaries—Martin Heidegger and Alasdair MacIntyre—who offer more explicit accounts of truth and with whom Ricoeur has some affinities. As we will see, Ricoeur’s distinctiveness emerges in how he balances history and ethics in view of truth. To mark this distinction, I will argue that both Heidegger and MacIntyre over-determine an aspect of truth—respectively, the truth of being as disclosure (*aletheia*) and truth as one and as the terminus of inquiry. In either case, the over-determination of truth fails to account adequately for our being-with others, which is central to Ricoeur’s thought.

In the first section, I provide a sketch of Ricoeur’s *conception* of truth, or how we can say he thinks truth in a broad sense. In the second and third sections, I attempt to elaborate this conception in terms of a *theory* of truth, or what is an analysis of truth employing analytical concepts. In particular I draw on the terms holism and fallibilism and attempt to interpret them in view of Ricoeur’s concern for ethical being, or what can be seen as grafting his philosophical anthropology on epistemological concepts that have been stripped of their relation to lived experience with others.¹

Between Heidegger and MacIntyre, Ontology and Metaphysics

To say that Ricoeur is situated between Heidegger and MacIntyre is a way of saying that he offers an account of truth that attempts to hold in balance the significance of ontological meaning as disclosure (the truth or meaning of being) and the metaphysical unity of truth (truth as one). He does so by emphasizing the role and

¹I should note that I take some liberty in ascribing the term “hermeneutical” to Ricoeur’s theory of truth. In drawing on earlier texts I am assuming that his discussion is consistent with his pre-hermeneutical thought (eg, *History and Truth*), aspects of his biblical hermeneutics, and his ethical thought in *Oneself as Another*. This unified reading of Ricoeur may irritate the more historically-minded scholar, but it is a necessary interpretive gambit if one is going to attempt to elaborate a topic Ricoeur only infrequently discusses.

importance of the historical complexity through which truth plays out in a condition of human plurality. For Ricoeur, truth may be a substantial concept according to which we attempt to think philosophically, but this project of thought is distinct from how we can actually live in view of truth. So while truth has a conceptual priority, Ricoeur nonetheless grounds it in his analysis of the human condition. This grounding is most prevalent in his constant reference to human fragility, which is not just the liability to err but an existential vulnerability that transforms the manner in which we should see how claims to knowing and understanding operate (Ricoeur 1986: 1; 1992: 22, 191–196). I will discuss fragility more thematically below. For the moment, I merely assume its general meaning. The upshot of this for Ricoeur is that the question of truth must be confronted and understood practically as it is experienced in the human condition of fragility. Furthermore, this condition is never overcome, especially not by a project aiming at certain, infallible knowledge. Rather, it must be taken up in a manner that yields the condition for attesting to one's own sense of meaning and the meaning of others. In the end, truth is interrelational.

(a) Heidegger and Truth as Disclosure

Heidegger's discussion of truth as disclosure (*aletheia*), or unconcealment, gives priority to the manner in which entities make themselves accessible to human understanding and action. Although *Being and Time* is largely dedicated to showing how truth is in some sense dependent on human understanding, there is nonetheless a subtext in which human disclosure of a world is possible only because being already gives itself. Consequently, this means that beings participate in this original force or power in the way they give us access to themselves. This donative meaning is what makes disclosure an event that the human subject cannot surpass or attempt to control through *episteme*. Taken together, humans and beings comprise a relation in which an original ontological disclosure is open to further disclosure (Heidegger 1971; cf. Sheehan 2001).² So it can be said that all human action and interaction is derivative of being's original and constant act of giving itself.

Furthermore, the human relation to disclosure is not based on sight, despite what terms like disclosure and unconcealment may suggest. On the contrary, it is precisely the identification of reason with clear perception that Heidegger wants to call into question (Heidegger 1962: 57–58/34). Hence, he emphasizes the *logos* of phenomenology not as the sight of reason but as the letting be through interpretation. "To the things themselves" does not mean seeing more accurately or sufficiently but attuning to being so that it can be grasped according to its complexity and subtlety. It is sight, or the traditionally rendered *lumen naturale*, that presupposes a capacity of reason to sort out this complexity in order to understand what is. Against this

²This comes out particularly in Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art" when he identifies earth as primordial source, or *phusis*, and world as the human poetic activity set in strife against it. On this reading, the so-called *Kehre* in Heidegger's thought does not refer to a shift of his thought in a non-anthropological direction but a turning within his thought that discloses features that were earlier concealed.

historical prejudice, which of course Heidegger traces to Plato's notion of the Idea, stands the thesis that Dasein's disclosedness is predicated upon discourse (Heidegger 1962: 171–172/133)—or what is spoken. Indeed, what can be spoken is only so because Dasein has first listened to being. As Jacques Derrida reminds us, hearing not only opens Dasein to its ownmost potential-for-being, but it also constitutes the destructive retrieval of the metaphysical tradition. It hears what metaphysics only construes in terms of (visual) presence (Derrida 1993: 164, 173, 179–180). So the most original or authentic mode of relation is the act of listening. Heidegger writes:

Hearing is constitutive for discourse [...] Listening to... is Dasein's existential way of Being-open as Being-with for Others. Indeed, hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. (Heidegger 1962: 206/163)

It is perhaps worth bearing in mind that although *Being and Time* is largely preoccupied with the human mode of being, and thus listening as it relates to one's own projects, Heidegger never departs from an essentially pre-Socratic conception of *logos* as a fundamental and intrinsic feature of being itself. Gadamer would later characterize this as the “universality of the hermeneutical problem” (Gadamer 1976: 3–17; cf. 1989: 474–491; cf. Beaufret 2006: 82; Ricoeur 1974: 464–465).

Ricoeur sits very closely to this Heideggerian account of truth in recognizing the primacy of disclosure and in giving priority to the role of listening. Consider the following passages:

[D]iscourse is established close to human experience and it is therefore in experiences more fundamental than any ontotheological articulation that I will seek the traits of a truth capable of being spoken of in terms of manifestation rather than verification, as well as the traits of a self-awareness wherein the subject would free himself of the arrogance of consciousness (Ricoeur 1977: 20).

And when agreeing with Heidegger that listening is existentially primary, Ricoeur notes the role of language:

The *logos* signified not only the power which makes things manifest and gathers them together [...] The power to gather things together by means of language does not originally belong to man as a speaking subject (Ricoeur 1974: 464).

Both disclosure and listening illuminate a fundamental condition of human existence that Heidegger and Ricoeur believe to have been missed by the history of philosophy. But, of course, for each the reasons for and extent to which what is missed differ. Hence, Ricoeur states that Heidegger “gives us no way to show in what sense historical understanding, properly speaking, is derived from this primordial understanding” of ontology (Ricoeur 1974: 10).³ In any event, the role of listen-

³Purcell (2013: 146) reads Ricoeur's criticism quite strongly as expressing a logical failure in Heidegger's thought. Purcell thus sees the appeal to primordial ontology as having a logical obligation to discuss how this ontology “explains the posterior level” (146) of derivative practices. I do not see this type of accusation in Ricoeur's criticism. Rather, it seems to me Ricoeur cites Heidegger's failure or refusal to let ontology be translated, correlated, interpreted in the direction of specific practices and methods (cf. Ricoeur 2013: 70–71). Hence, Heidegger dissolves historical knowledge by his ontology. It is not that Heidegger failed to address a question of logical consis-

ing occupies an important role not only in terms of marking a rupture with traditional accounts of truth in terms of metaphors of seeing, but also in terms of how the human observer is placed in and before being. The metaphor of sight, as Derrida (1974 and 1983) observes, tends to be colonized by notions of human mastery and dominance. For the metaphysical tradition, to see is to see in its entirety, perhaps from an Archimedean point; if not, then, from a position least affected by agent-relative determinations. Listening, in contrast, is a mode of engagement predicated on sensitivity and receptivity to others.

This is readily apparent in Ricoeur's reflections on the Book of Job when he comments that Job's transformation comes only through the recognition of a fragility that no longer attempts to find protection or consolation but attends to what is prior to these reactions, an encounter with being by listening that results in "the love of creation [...] which depends on no external compensation" (Ricoeur 1974: 467). In its ethical role, listening can be said to have its privilege when Ricoeur discusses the role of conscience (Ricoeur 1992: 352). Not the sight of the face of the other, but its voice: "Here I stand!" (Ricoeur 1992: 336).⁴ In short, one can say that for Ricoeur the primordial act of listening is fulfilled only when it becomes a listening to being with and for others. This extension of the act is in one sense Ricoeur's insistence on undertaking a necessary detour in order to recover ontology. Yet, it can also be taken more definitively to express a thesis on the relation to truth. This relation may be historical, as Heidegger insists, but what comprises this history of being is precisely the ethical relation to others.

Let me draw attention to this point more boldly. It is not just that Ricoeur's thought differs from Heidegger with regard to the way he sees ontology requiring an ethics (or a certain rendering of it). Rather, my suggestion is that Ricoeur sees truth as inextricably tied to ethical relations.⁵ Its analysis cannot simply reside at the formal or symbolic level (ie, as he mentions above in terms of verification), but must take into account statements, propositions, and utterances as they occur in a specific historical situation between someone who is speaking to someone else about something.

The ethical dimension is thus never far, for instance, from how Ricoeur envisages the tasks of translation and historical analysis. The truth for each task is one whose *telos* is situated in view of communicating with others. (As we will see, this differs from MacIntyre's notion of *telos*.) Translation is based on the model of linguistic hospitality while the historian aims at a "good subjectivity" responsible to the past and present (Ricoeur 2006: 23 and 1965: 30). Put more radically, one can say that in the last analysis there is an identity between truth and ethics where for something to be true requires not just a logical articulation but an ethical one. Is this not implied when Ricoeur announces that "[c]ommunication is a structure of true knowledge"

tency, but that on his account this demand is a wrong one. Ricoeur (1986: 47–48) appears to offer a similar criticism of transcendental reflection.

⁴For a discussion of listening and conscience in relation to social conflict, see Mei (2016).

⁵I leave untreated how this ethical dimension relates to truth disclosed by the world of the text; cf. Ricoeur (1977).

(Ricoeur 1965: 51)? And what is communication if not an event taking place with others and which has as its paragon a kind of community, a friendship. If this did not play an important role in Ricoeur's thought, he would not venture to say that there is "[n]o truth without friendship."⁶

Should the proposed identity between ethics and truth in Ricoeur's thought be any surprise? The ontological disclosure of truth leads to ethical concerns precisely because listening to being is itself never unmediated and is already an interpretation set alongside other interpretations by those who are also listening. This identity, nevertheless, is one that is only maintained through the detour of engaging with others such that ethics cannot be first philosophy in some unmediated sense. The call to be ethical does not come from outside oneself as an injunction *à la* Levinas, but in being-with others. That is to say, the call of being is never immediately one's own, but a voice that one hears only in a world, a place, a situation with others (Ricoeur 1992: 351). In discourse, in debate, in attempting to understand others, the ethical perspective must be recognized and won through attending to specific features and dimensions of what is at stake. So the identity between truth and ethics does not cancel other modes of discourse or other forms of regional analysis but presupposes their presence and their involvement. Logic, for example, does not become obsolete since it comprises part of the manner in which things can be said and heard. Different methods and approaches may be involved in an analysis of truth, but the intentional relation to truth—or as Heidegger would say, our comportment towards the disclosure of being—is ethical by virtue of having an intention towards something that may clarify, translate, unify, incite action, and so on. To reiterate, this does not mean that ethics is first philosophy, but rather an inevitable context in which truth plays out.

Another way of understanding this ethical identity of truth is in the manner in which being can be said in many ways (Ricoeur 1992: 299). To speak truthfully about being requires negotiating those language games arising from different perspectives, orders, traditions, and disciplines. So the situation is already one that requires a duty of care in listening... "Starting from this fact of life, let us translate!" (Ricoeur 2006: 20).

In contrast, the emphasis on listening in Heidegger falls on how to listen appropriately, to be ever situated with this question, to see the question itself as the response to being. That being can be said in many ways requires returning to the origin of being, or being understood as origin. It is not that Heidegger's philosophy is un-ethical or a-ethical on this view. Rather, his conception of ethics, as arising from the questions of being and dwelling, drives towards a different notion of what

⁶I assume Ricoeur (2004: 336) is speaking favourably of Henri Marrou's philosophy of history. I describe friendship as a regulative ideal because the realization that one's own existence can only occur in "living together" is a reflexive one confronted by several obstacles, not least of which are the ways in which friendship reduces to utility and pleasure; Ricoeur (1992: 186–187). Compare Ricoeur's (2004: 384) intention to remain with the subject of the practice of the historian when thinking Heidegger's notion of historicity.

it means to be ethical. Appropriateness to others presupposes an appropriateness to being.

Having said this, Heideggerians might allege that the ethical concern as Ricoeur articulates it is trivial. The argument, they might say, is one of recognizing what kind of ethics follows from ontology, and not presupposing what ethical being must look like. On this view, appropriate action is more accurately conceived as a kind of habitation (*ethos*) within being that can only come by way of listening to being itself. But this response only helps to mark what is at stake in a notion of truth. The stakes of a theory of truth come down to that on which our beliefs might have traction. According to my account of Heidegger, what is at stake is an appropriate relation to being, while for Ricoeur it is the prospective momentum by which truth draws one into more determinate and intimate relations with others.⁷ I am not sure this is an either/or situation, but one that requires, on the Ricoeurian view, constant mediation, or on the Heideggerian one, the recognition that it cannot be overcome.

(b) MacIntyre and truth as one

With MacIntyre one finds a commensurate concern for ethical being as a capacity to co-exist with others. To do so means contending within the complexity of historical understanding that MacIntyre represents in terms of traditions and rivalries. At stake in these conflicts are reasoned accounts of practices in view of a *telos* of comprehension. This *telos* may not be actualizable, but it nonetheless exists insofar as every act of reasoning recognizes as its aim a terminus in which reasoning would ideally be complete or sufficient (MacIntyre 2006: 56–58, 156). As with the previous sub-section, I want to focus on what Ricoeur shares with his counterpart before distinguishing between them.

Both Ricoeur and MacIntyre express a commitment to understanding human existence in relation to the metaphysical principle of unity—that this individual and fragmented life can be understood and lived in relation to a meaningful whole. Both therefore understand unity in quite a substantive sense, and given their religious affiliations and commitments, this would seem no surprise. As early as their Bampton Lectures on religion and atheism from 1966 (MacIntyre and Ricoeur 1969), significant nuances can be detected with regard to their respective conceptions of unity, that is, what ontologically and metaphysically consists in unity and how we should attempt to live ethically in accord with it. It may be that these differences can be explained more superficially in terms of MacIntyre's Catholicism and Ricoeur's Reformed Protestantism, but I think these kinds of explanations, no matter how historically accurate, miss a very important point. Neither philosopher is reducible to his religious convictions. Rather, both hold philosophical views that are plausible and compelling for *philosophical* reasons even if other reasons may be involved.

⁷Another way of seeing this difference between Heidegger and Ricoeur is in the latter's development of the concept of attestation as a response to the former's concept of anticipation. See Jean Greisch (2001: 379–385).

For MacIntyre, unity is a cosmological feature that endows everything occurring within the cosmos its distinction. Though not using the term unity, he does in fact describe the universe according to a pre-existing order. One of his key arguments with reference to a theory of truth and language is that truthful assertions are good not simply because they provide an accurate account of how things are—that is, true beliefs about a certain state of affairs. More importantly, argues MacIntyre, the good of truthful assertions enables one to think *how things are* in terms of *why things are*. In other words, the goal of inquiry is not simply to settle on a truthful account of how things are but to reach a terminus of understanding. This terminus is neither a conglomeration of truthful accounts, nor is it a goal simply because truthful assertions are utile for human existence. The “why” of inquiry strives towards achieving an understanding of “the place of the objects about which [the mind] judges in the overall order of things” (MacIntyre 2006: 207). Indeed, MacIntyre’s appeal to the overall order of things is substantive and should be taken in a strong sense of there being a complete and final coherence to reality that the mind ceaselessly attempts to grasp:

It is then a metaphysical presupposition of this view of truth that there is an order of things and this order exists independently of the human mind, just as do the objects and sets of objects that find their place within it (MacIntyre 2006: 206).

The cosmological implications of this metaphysical presupposition are perhaps most evident in his sympathetic portrayal of the ancient Greek conception of cosmic order and justice. He comments in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*:

For the use of the word ‘*dike*’ [...] presupposed that the universe had a single fundamental order, an order structuring both nature and society [...] To be *dikaios* is to conduct one’s actions and affairs in accordance with this order (MacIntyre 1988: 14).

The metaphysical notion of order to which MacIntyre is philosophically committed involves an already established coherency with which the human mind seeks conformity, or what is the rational form of inquiry to which he often alludes. Consider, for example, his comment on first principles:

Genuinely first principles, so I shall argue, can have a place only within a universe characterized in terms of certain determinate, fixed and unalterable ends, ends which provide a standard by reference to which our individual purposes, desires, interests, and decisions can be evaluated as well or badly directed (MacIntyre 2006: 146).

In other words, truth, as the goal of inquiry, is one:

To make any assertion whatsoever is to be committed to the judgment that that assertion is true—not true in this or that domain, not true for this or that group of human beings, but true (MacIntyre 2009: 67).

Metaphysical unity determines how we should understand how truth is operative historically and socially.

MacIntyre is, of course, very much aware of the historical efforts of humankind to attempt to achieve this conformity and the ways in which such attempts have gone and can go terribly wrong, both philosophically and politically. He is by no means a champion of a monological notion of reason (cf. Barry 1995: 119–124).

Nonetheless, if MacIntyre has an aversion to overly simple notions of objectivity and truth, it is difficult to see how he does not, at some fundamental level, believe that rational inquiry should be measured by the eternal standards of order, whatever they may be, which constitute the universe as it is. This is because such a strong commitment to truth resolves into the argument that there cannot be competing truths; in the end the final terminus is one truth. And what we may regard as distinct or even singular domains of reality and human existence are inadequate ways of conceiving forms of inquiry. MacIntyre argues that distinct domains of inquiry “are not self-enclosed, so that truths in any one domain have no implications for what is true or false in any of the others” (MacIntyre 2009: 68). However, this seemingly totalistic and totalizing representation of inquiry, while no doubt diminishing the relative viewpoints of different peoples, also entails a demand that existing traditions and institutions submit their own precepts, practices, and beliefs to the test of historically developing knowledge. MacIntyre's conception of debate is forward-driven in the sense that he sees any claims to universality—whether they be moral claims or individual assertions of rights—presuppose a kind of test of universalization. Yet rather than the criteria for this test being known in advance, MacIntyre concedes that from our current historical standpoint we work our way towards the universal terminus by engaging with what appears historically as the most compelling reasons. Indeed, MacIntyre's conception of rival traditions requires historical transformation through the philosophical and moral imagination. The progression towards truth, whilst not a final declaration that eliminates or marginalizes historical predecessors, is an on-going self-reflection from within a particular tradition. MacIntyre, of course, retrieves historical sources to articulate what is problematic about modernity, and this articulation provides, in view of his conceptions of truth and order, the resources by which we can progress beyond philosophical parochialism.

It would seem that MacIntyre's forward-driven philosophical outlook would sit uneasily with Ricoeur. Consider, for example, Ricoeur's criticisms of MacIntyre's one-dimensional account of narrative understanding, which omits discussion of those types of particularities that problematize the notion of a narrative unity of life: the difference between fictional author/narrator and the one who authors and narrates one's life; the categorical difference between fiction and life with respect to beginnings and endings; and finally, the entanglement of other life histories and narratives in real life (Ricoeur 1992: 159–162). Nonetheless, one can see a similarity between the two philosophers. Ricoeur states,

The unity of the world and the unity of man are too near and yet too distant: near as horizon which is never reached, distant as a figure seen through an infrangible pane of glass (Ricoeur 1965: 195; cf. 176).

The view of unity as a horizon is perhaps indicative of the kind of terminus to which MacIntyre alludes. Moreover, the unbreakable glass separating us from reaching this terminus can be understood, on MacIntyre's view, as the historical process continually unfolding new modes of engagement and debate. There is also another respect that joins MacIntyre to Ricoeur, and this is the way Ricoeur sees the order

inherent to the universe as the prerequisite for human understanding. Ricoeur thus sees the unity of the world correlative to the unity of humankind (Ricoeur 1965: 194–195).

This jointure between the overall coherence of the universe and human beings within the universe cannot be underestimated. As we saw with MacIntyre, it provides the metaphysical context in which truth extends beyond the private soul contemplating its internal reality. With respect to Ricoeur, this jointure provides the foundation upon which “the effort and desire to be” can be developed ethically, that is, the co-existence with others in the institutions we develop. Yet despite these similarities, there is no mistaking Ricoeur’s unwavering intention to characterize fragility over against unity:

[W]e are incapable of coinciding with “the flux of existence which lays the ground for all attitudes.” First, this unique experience, which is my unique life, is never reflected in its lived simplicity; it is immediately perceived through the diverse cultural realizations which divide it. [...] Man’s unity is too primordial to be understood; but above all, our cultural life is torn by the rivalling passions which have created it and to which religion adds its own: theological rage, pharisaic bad faith, ecclesiastical intolerance (Ricoeur 1965: 195).

The problem of fragility is perhaps most clearly articulated in its ethical context, thirty five years later, when Ricoeur discusses the ability of the self to relate to others—the “shattered cogito” fragmented by the passions as well as its own lack of certainty (Ricoeur 1992: 22). The question for Ricoeur is not how to overcome uncertainty—that is, how to find a necessary and sufficient foundation or process of reasoning. Rather, it is to understand the passions and fallible reason positively and productively. In other words, the project of certain knowing is as misled as it is impossible since it would result in a no-longer human existence. So when Ricoeur comments,

Anyone who wished to escape this contingency of historical encounters and stand apart from the game in the name of a non-situated ‘objectivity’ would at most know everything, but understand nothing (Ricoeur 1967: 24),

he is insisting on a difference between knowledge and understanding. If we are to follow his own caution expressed some thirteen years after the passage above (Ricoeur 1981), then we should be wary of maintaining the distinction between the two. In fact, the attempt to construct a theory of truth from Ricoeur’s thought requires conceiving knowledge as no longer wed to the ideal of a non-situated objectivity as it is for traditional metaphysics and epistemology, but as a situated one—in history and with others.

In a similar spirit to his response to the metaphysical rendering of theodicy, Ricoeur’s conception of truth can be said to divest itself of traditional representations. Truth may exist, it may be synonymous in some way with a metaphysical unity (Ricoeur 1965: 180), but this does not mean that it should be understood metaphysically. It is true that there is a distinctively Kantian dimension to this disposition with respect to the limits of human knowledge: “I cannot express, articulate, or enunciate this unity rationally, for there is no Logos within this unity” (Ricoeur 1965: 55). But unlike Kant, Ricoeur seeks to complicate the privileging of

reason by thinking the relation to truth, not in terms of living in accordance with it, but from the ground up as it is situated within plurality.⁸ Not to rise above this plurality in order to reason, but to reason through and in it. He comments, "Within the context of the concrete life of a civilization, the spirit of truth is to respect the complexity of the various orders of truth; it is the recognition of plurality" (Ricoeur 1965: 189; cf. 165). The task of thinking truth begins by conserving our encounter with plurality and not by synthesizing it, or what Johann Michal refers to as Ricoeur's "broken Hegelianism" (Michel 2015: 33–40). It is true that MacIntyre does not posit such a synthesis as the terminus of inquiry; however, the process of inquiry is itself governed by it in a strong metaphysical sense. The contrast with Ricoeur's concern for fragility helps to see the consequences of this governance. Truth may not be realizable, but it gives to each unique group a sense of authority that, on Ricoeur's account, is potentially problematic, if not threatening. "The *One* is too distant a reward; it is an evil temptation" (Ricoeur 1965: 165). It inevitably culminates in the transformation of the wish for totality as a totalization. Perhaps this is why MacIntyre insists on the language of rivalry and Ricoeur on mediation.

I want to conclude this section by stating succinctly what I believe to be Ricoeur's *conception* of truth. While retaining the notion of disclosure from Heidegger, Ricoeur nonetheless sees disclosure as something that cannot be isolated as the originary truth of being. Thus, Ricoeur's turn to ethics vis-a-vis a solicitude for the other is not simply a choice to pursue a different direction from the ontology proposed by Heidegger. When conceiving this turn within the general territory of an analysis of truth, it becomes a definitive statement about the nature of truth. Its historical disclosure cannot be disentangled from our ethical relations with others. With regard to MacIntyre's attempt to accommodate plurality according to the unity of truth, I argued that while Ricoeur endorses a conception of unity, in the end he would be unhappy with MacIntyre's notion of "truth as one," which inevitably distorts the relation to truth because it reinserts a metaphysical dominance under the sign of a terminus of inquiry. From Ricoeur's perspective, truth as one acts as a "fault" according to which "the wish of reason" for unity is a "first violence" (Ricoeur 1965: 165). Truth is not won by laying claim to a terminus, no matter how sufficient an account might be. Rather, it is won only in and through an attempt at mutually understanding others with whom one persists in the effort to be. This shift not only emphasizes the importance of the plurality of beliefs but it also attempts to prevent the mediation of conflicts of meaning and interpretation from reducing to relativism. Ricoeur's notion of fallibilism, as we will see, assumes truth is operative in guiding discussion but requires to be worked out *in situ* according to specific criteria.

⁸ More recent revisions of Kant fall prey to this as well. See Mei (2014: 253 n. 48).

Ricoeur's Holistic Fallibilism

Let us now turn from a conception of truth to its theory, or what involves a discreet analysis of Ricoeur's concept that might yield an argument about what it means for a belief to be true. To recall from the last section, the consequence of this analysis is not just local to a theory of beliefs, propositions, and language. Rather, what is at stake in determining what it means for a belief to be true bears directly on how we might conceive human understanding as participating in the world and being-with others.

(a) Holism and Fallibilism

Holism and fallibilism are terms typically employed in epistemology when discussing theories of truth and justification. A holistic conception of truth refers to the idea that no single belief makes sense on its own and that it must be viewed within its larger systematic structure. Holism therefore maintains that truth cannot be the property of individual beliefs but rather beliefs as they cohere within a system. For example, H. H. Joachim argues that "Truth in its essential nature is that systematic coherence which is the character of a significant whole" (Joachim 1999: 50, §26). The strength of holism I want to emphasize here, and which I will modify when discussing Ricoeur's holism, is the thesis that meaning is a phenomenon belonging to a general structure, or significant whole. Holism therefore conceives truth in some ideal, universal sense (i.e., Truth) that cannot be entirely realized by finite human knowledge (Joachim 1999: 52, §27). So when Willard Quine (1951: 39) concludes that "the unit of empirical significance is the whole of science," he is attesting to truth as embodied in the general system of scientific knowledge, yet only incompletely since scientific knowledge is ever-developing. Having said that, it is important to note that there is no agreement amongst holists about what general structure is the most complete or indeed what might constitute a hierarchy of individual structures within the general one.⁹

Fallibilism is the thesis that human knowledge is by its nature incomplete. So one may be able to provide justification for a belief, but this justification can never be absolute or final. Fallibilism can thus be seen as a counter-argument to rationalist claims to certainty, as for example in Descartes' reference to clear and distinct perception by which one has "true and certain knowledge" (Descartes 1996: 48). A stronger version of fallibilism argues that certain knowledge is impossible given the limitation of the human mind so that even a type of research program that progresses

⁹There is also a holistic theory of justification accounting for the criteria according to which one can say one is justified in believing a proposition to be true. In speaking about Ricoeur's conception of truth, as we shall see, it is more accurate to describe him as a fallibilist since he does require the criteria of consistency and connection within a set of beliefs. Indeed, for him to do so would mean contradicting his view that discourse is polyvalent and situational. Holistic justification, in attempting to strive for overall consistency, has to fix the meaning of beliefs in order to maintain epistemic equilibrium. If one belief in the set has multiple meanings or is situation-dependent, its cohesion would break down.

historically by improving on aspects of a current body of knowledge will always represent a finite understanding. Paul Feyerabend argues, for example, that the natural sciences are by no means complete or unified, that scientific methodologies are themselves finitely determined and progress in science requires counter-inductive hypotheses (Feyerabend 1993: 9–23). The appeal of fallibilism is its de-centering of the human mind as the master of meaning and reality, something that fits well with the general post-structural suspicion of the Enlightenment. What is less appealing is the inherent pessimism about human knowledge. How can fallible existence not reduce to a futile one? Ricoeur's emphasis on fallibility shares some aspects with fallibilism, though it is modified according to his anthropology.

(b) Ricoeur, Holism, and Fallibility

Let us therefore distinguish Ricoeur's theory of truth in relation to the typical meanings of holism and fallibilism. We have seen in the discussion of MacIntyre that Ricoeur acknowledges the role of unity as a metaphysical principle yet in a limited, or to borrow Michel's term, "broken" sense. Metaphysics occupies a role that is more consistent with an initial optative yearning rather than a first philosophy. Or as Ricoeur says, unity is "indispensable" for thought but "entirely 'formal'" (Ricoeur 1965: 192). Another way of describing its indispensability is to say that it is the presupposition of all thought that attempts to understand in order to live. Thus, holism in Ricoeur's thought can be seen as the recognition of an ordered universe that is necessarily presupposed by our understanding: "This totality, therefore, must be given in some way prior to philosophy" (Ricoeur 1986: 4). He speaks of various forms of discourse as attesting to and expressing this whole, especially in myth, and as enabling reflection because it takes the whole as something towards which discreet analyses must move. However, Ricoeur by no means sees unity as the aim that philosophical investigation must clarify and achieve. That is to say, per above, unity is entirely formal. It is formal because it prompts the occasion of philosophy (from our perspective of being in discordance with it) but not its ends. Its deliberate pursuit, Ricoeur comments, often results in closed systematic structures that often become totalizing: "All too quickly it has been said: It [unity] is there, it is Mind, it is Nature, it is History" (Ricoeur 1986: 48–49).

Ricoeur's holism can therefore be construed in terms of a significant whole, as opposed to a general structure or system. The latter is indicative of a *closed* totality in which individuality and modification is merely a reiteration of some other aspect of the whole and thereby subsumed to it. Ricoeur's criticism of semiotics and Hegelian dialectic can be seen as resisting closed systems. Semiotics views the meaning of signs in terms of relations to other signs and thus does not allow for the predication of new meaning in discourse as with metaphor (Ricoeur 1978: 66–76). Hegel's characterization of reason and the actualization of Spirit involve a totalization of social and political being in relation to ideas of which we can no longer be certain. The closed nature of the Hegelian system is one in which its cunning presupposes those ideas which seem self-evident for actualization (Ricoeur 1988: 205).

Having said this, the term "significant whole" should be understood in two ways. First, it is formal in the sense of being signified and as enabling reflection.

Ricoeur refers to this in general in terms of the role of signification as allowing for critical reflection (Ricoeur 1981: 117). Second, its formality emphasizes the human relation to it as incomplete. Thus enters fallibilism.

Ricoeur's notion of fallibility fills out the incompleteness of the metaphysical formal unity. By this I mean, the formal unity is incomplete because it disregards how the truth claims we make are bound up with a kind of being that is inextricably with others. So while fallibilism may be a thesis about the limitations of human knowing, it also provides a way of productively engaging with this limitation by placing the locus of truth *on agreement with others* (even if this may be impossible in many circumstances) as opposed to some objective standard or set of criteria (which are impossible to establish). This rendering of agreement does not necessarily involve the criticism that what one holds to be true may not correspond to the way the world really is.¹⁰ This is because the belief in an objective world external to our perception is itself the product of a formal notion of unity. (Hence, why we see below the way scientific methodology can become imperialistic and distortive.) This external world may indeed exist in one sense, but to assert so from the human perspective is to introduce the human mode of understanding and interpretation as part of this external world. There is not just nature, but humans within nature, producing and reproducing according to their actions and systems of thought. To reiterate, the upshot of this view is that an analysis of truth falls on the interrelation between those beings making assertions about what is true. It prohibits a sense that reflection can be entirely coincident with this whole as in claims to absolute and certain knowledge. Our fallibility thus plays a crucial, active role in how truth is worked out, or what Ricoeur calls the task of approximation, and which together is captured for him by the symbol of the tower of Babel (Ricoeur 1986: 49 and 2004: 12, respectively).

Being-true: What it Means for a Belief to be True

The stakes of Ricoeur's account of truth in view of the human condition are now becoming clear. Because Ricoeur revises Heidegger's disclosure thesis by including being-with others, disclosure is no longer purely ontological but a being-with others. It is in this sense other-dependent, and the *eventual* nature of truth (*Ereignis*) then becomes one that cannot be analyzed at the level of individual statements abstracted from this fundamental relation. One can say Ricoeur's holism is a significant whole comprised primarily by being-with others. What is distinctive about this turn is that unlike a narrow epistemological approach that seeks a corrective to fallible judgments, Ricoeur's approach examines the conditions in which we attempt to utter beliefs. It is precisely these conditions that determine how truth is instantiated in our statements about reality. In other words, traditional epistemological approaches assume that not only can the predicate "is true" apply to statements

¹⁰Or what is a common criticism of coherentism; Almeder (1986: 213).

abstracted from historical and existential conditions, but moreover, that a judgment about its applicability can be determined by criteria valid for any of these conditions (truth is one). To be sure, Ricoeur's notion of attestation figures centrally in how meaning assumes a specific assertional form as an expression of confidence (belief-in) in one's capacity to act. I address the role of attestation elsewhere (Mei 2016), and in this section I want to examine how attestation is involved in what it means for a belief to be true.

From what I have said above, claims to truth are indexed in a double sense. First, to the situational event in which a speaker attests in a belief. Second, to the personal and collective experience shaped by a historical culture. This second sense involves not only the experience of the speaker but the culture and historical forum the speaker faces. The two are not always the same. To describe this type of indexing of beliefs, Ricoeur refers to the notion of "being-true" (Ricoeur 1992: 299), which is meant to capture the complexity and plurivocity of the ontological and historical dimensions of existence. The ontological involves the manner in which, following Aristotle, being can be said in many ways. The historical, as indicated above, describes the specific cultural heritage in which being is said. Ricoeur is not just recognizing cultural pluralism but attempting to work out how pluralism can be held accountable to truth without reducing to one account of it. What does it then mean for a belief to be true?¹¹

For something to be true on Ricoeur's account means that the *person* uttering the belief has some *stake* in the belief and how it *applies* to a situation in which the utterer may *act*. The locus of this "definition" is in the application of a belief by the utterer. Or, the truth of a belief is relative to its application to a situation by the person uttering the belief. I want to elaborate this in terms of four features: agency, commitment, application, and capability.

Agency Let us note that the focus turns from what the belief should do (correspond, cohere, achieve an end or operational value) to what the person uttering the belief is considering in terms of an action. On Ricoeur's account, the foregrounding of the role of the person is consistent with expanding the philosophical analysis of statements beyond the philosophy of language. This is because in typical analyses of statements, the subject (human) is understood to be transparent, with the status of the statement or belief as that which is truly opaque. Ricoeur's turn towards the opacity of the utterer is not just one of complicating the philosophy of language with a further obstacle but of switching the direction of analysis altogether. This is evident when the argument in *Oneself as Another* moves from the complication of the "I" who utters to a more substantial thesis about the speaking subject who is constituted by a personal, narrative identity (Cf. Ricoeur 1992: 44–45 and 113–

¹¹ I therefore do not attempt to account for how we can determine beliefs to be true, which involves a theory of justification. Rather, I will explain what it means for a belief to be true according to Ricoeur's theory. The difference in tasks can be seen in how the correspondence theory of truth holds that for a belief to be true a statement must correspond to a state of affairs. Yet, to talk about how one determines whether a statement does indeed correspond involves a distinct process of justification. See note 14 below.

114). Why this shift? Because without personal identity, which involves a narrative grasp of one's life, the utterance examined by the philosophy of language has no existential application. It does not actually relate to a real situation. Hence, the subject who speaks is really the agent who intends to act in relation to a situation. Thus, statements are both locutionary and illocutionary insofar as the latter aims to achieve some end by virtue of saying it. Simply put, statements involve practices (See Ricoeur 1992: 154–155 and Ricoeur 1981: 168, 199 and 205).

Commitment For the utterer to have some stake in the truth of the belief is to say that he or she has some commitment. Generally speaking, beliefs involve a *commitment* because statements are interlocutionary and illocutionary. With respect to interlocution, the “I” of statement is, on Ricoeur's account, “bipolar” since

it implies simultaneously an ‘I’: that speaks and a ‘you’ to whom the former addresses itself. “I affirm that” equals “I declare to you that”; “I promise that” equals “I promise you that” (Ricoeur 1992: 43–44).

Another way of thinking about the substantial nature of interlocution is in terms of attestation, where to speak to another person is to attest to what you believe, and therefore will do, in relation to him or her. In addition to interlocution, the illocutionary force of beliefs, in which one does by and through saying, therefore assumes a degree of commitment in which one designates oneself as an agent undertaking what is deemed necessary or appropriate. It is true that not all beliefs will require action of an ethical nature. But the supposition here is that the fact that a belief is uttered is because the agent intends the utterance to affirm what he or she may do. On this view, what then can be said about typical statements of analysis—e.g. “The cat is on the mat”? Such beliefs are trivial but not irrelevant, and they are so because the degree of commitment to the belief has trivial aims or implications.

Application Truth (i.e., “is true”) is not a predicate describing the belief but a way of describing the application of the belief by the utterer. Hence, if beliefs involve some kind of commitment about how to act and why, their truth resides in the relation joining utterer to the situation and to those to whom he or she is speaking. Application is therefore a mode of truth, or the being-true, of a belief as it is enacted. To make a promise to someone involves an action of keeping the promise at some moment or throughout some duration. The enacting of the promise can be said to be an application of what one believes to be true in its respective context and not necessarily in any other.

Capability It is clear from the committed and illocutionary nature of beliefs that they enable an agent to act. Beliefs therefore have an attestational quality that lends to the agent a sense of capacity, or power, to do. Ricoeur refers to this as “an ontology of act and of power” in which power expresses “the power-to-act of an agent to whom an action is ascribed or imputed” (Ricoeur 1992: 303).¹² Acting presupposes

¹²He also mentions the power-in-common of historical communities.

a form of self-reflexivity in which the end of the action is brought to the attention of the agent. Beliefs, in this sense, allow one to attest to what is relevant to do in a situation in relation to others as well as see oneself as responsible, or imputable, for these beliefs.¹³

Conclusion

In attempting to construct a theory of truth from Ricoeur's philosophy, I have drawn on what I see to be two decisive features consistent throughout his career, or what I have termed the holisitic and fallibilistic elements of his thought. The holism consists of a formal unity that is made complete only when accounting for our fallibilistic relation with others. Hence, the analysis of truth should not privilege an abstract representation of beliefs that omits the specific situational and historical context in which the belief is uttered by a person in view of an action in relation to others. At the cost of over-determining the ethical thought of Ricoeur, I concluded that this means being-with others becomes the overall context in which the truth of a belief can be grasped. Truth is in some sense an event of the relation with others. The merit of Ricoeur's theory of truth is that it broadens the space in which we recognize beliefs occurring. It may complicate the analysis of beliefs because it introduces more variables, yet its richness lies in recognizing the more extensive manner in which statements about things involve much more intimate conditions when we make claims to truth. Accordingly, propositions and judgments expressed in linguistic form no longer serve as the privileged means of analysis as it does for traditional epistemology. An analysis of truth, it can be said, remains more in the event of the interrelation of speaking subjects as opposed to applying criteria in order to determine the reasonableness of their statements. To be sure, I have not attempted to discuss the details by which a process of validating beliefs in a Ricoeurian fashion might operate. But let me note in closing that such a process would involve reconceiving how justification draws on historically and ethically formed convictions about what it means to be with others. In this sense, it is not enough merely to pay lip service to these historical and ethical contexts since the veracity of beliefs presupposes these contexts.¹⁴

¹³ Perhaps a distinction needs to be raised between what I have offered as Ricoeur's theory of truth and pragmatic accounts since both focus on how an agent achieves an end by way of beliefs. I omit discussion of this due to the scope of this chapter. However, generally it can be remarked that Ricoeur places greater weight on the ethical nature of ends and beliefs and as well the substantive (as opposed to pragmatic) nature of discourse.

¹⁴ I deal with this analysis in terms of the justification of convictions (Mei 2014; 2016). My sincere thanks to the editors for their suggestions and comments in view of making this chapter more cohesive. I would also like to thank Maureen Junker-Kenny and Pamela Sue Anderson for their comments on a version of this chapter which was presented on November 19, 2013 at the Ricoeur Centenary Congress (1913–2013) hosted by the Fonds Ricoeur in Paris, France.

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